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FEMALE LIFE IN PRISON

BY
F. W. ROBINSON

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"THE COURTING OF MARY SMITH," "LAZARUS IN LONDON,"
"GRANDMOTHER'S MONEY," ETC., ETC.,

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PREFACE TO THE "PRISON SERIES"

It has been an open secret for the last few years that the writer of these lines is the author of "Female Life in Prison," "Jane Cameron," and "Prison Characters" —the author of them so far that he has put into words and into shape the utterances of one who was for several years a prison matron in Government service, and who, retiring from ill health before the publication of the "Prison Series," thought that some little good might be done to prisoners and prison matrons, and for the workings of prison government, by the publication of those details of the shadow-land in which she had existed. And that some good was effected thereby, that public attention was interested, prison systems very much modified, new regulations adopted, and the condition of the convict more closely studied, and even improved, on account of the Prison Matron's books, there are the records of a Royal Commission still to prove. The writer has only to assert that his work has been a faithful transcript of authentic details, and that herein is "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

F. W. ROBINSON.



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PREFACE TO THE FOURTH EDITION

It is singular to look back upon the various official changes that have marked the interim between the first introduction of this work to the public and the issue of its Fourth Edition. I can remember no period, measured by years instead of months, wherein the alterations have been so manifold, — for better, for worse, the future can alone determine.

Prison life of to-day is scarcely the prison life which I attempted to depicture. New theories of prison discipline are now in force; new prisons have been opened and old ones given up; new hands regulate, or endeavour to regulate—that, the future must also determine—the complex machinery by which our criminals are governed.

Millbank Prison belongs solely to the “refractories” at this time; the old Reformatory at Parkhurst, under the able superintendence of Mrs. Gibson, is now a Government prison for all who behave well at Brixton; Broadmoor is open under a medical direction, and the principle is attempted there of treating all “refractories” —women prone to “break-out” — as lunatics; the Roman Catholic priests hold service daily in our English gaols.

May I humbly suggest, in this place, the need for close watch on the part of the Directors, and of the

outside public, of the workings of the Broadmoor system, and of the result of the introduction of regular Roman Catholic services into Government prisons?

Broadmoor, as an institution where the most dangerous of the "dangerous classes" can be subjected to especial treatment, is a step in the right direction; but surely the Broadmoor rules and regulations are verging on that extreme of kindness which approximates to the wrong. When mad criminals, or women feigning madness, are allowed every indulgence—even, if report be true, to *dancing parties* at regular intervals—I can venture to predict that every "long-timed" woman will be anxious to be pronounced mad, and use every endeavour to persuade the authorities of the fact.

And I believe that, if the Roman Catholic services be longer, or offer more change from the monotony of labour, we shall also hear of many converts.

Two men who thought deeply of prisons and prisoners have passed away since the publication of this work—Richard Whately, Lord Archbishop of Dublin, and Sir Joshua Jebb, K.C.B. In the former the Author has lost one friend and patron, whose kind verdict on this work will ever remain a grateful reminiscence connected with the writing of it; and in the latter, prisoners and prison matrons will miss one whose life was devoted to the great study of reforming our convict population.

In conclusion, let me reiterate that from no officer receiving wages for Government service have I been indebted for any matter for my pages; and also, to all friends of the past, known and unknown, who by their kind words helped to promote this book's success, let me offer here my hearty thanks.

CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTORY	II
II. A PRISONER'S RECEPTION	17
III. A DAY'S ROUTINE	23
IV. PRISON MATRONS IN GENERAL	30
V. PRISONERS IN GENERAL	41
VI. PRISON CHARACTERS: THE GARNETTS	58
VII. SEEING THE DIRECTOR, LADY SUPERINTENDENT, AND SURGEON	66
VIII. PRISON CHARACTERS: CELESTINA SOMMER	75
IX. PRISONERS' VANITY	81
X. PRISON CHARACTERS: "TIB"	90
XI. BREAKINGS-OUT	99
XII. "THE DARK"	109
XIII. PRISON CHARACTERS: A MOUSE-TAMER	116
XIV. PRISONERS' FRIENDS	122
XV. PRISON CHARACTERS: "GRANNY COLLIS"	138
XVI. PRISON CHILDREN	143
XVII. PRISON CHARACTERS: MARY ANN BALL	148
XVIII. GOOD-CONDUCT WOMEN AND THEIR PRIVILEGES	157
XIX. PRISON CHARACTERS: A FIGHT FOR A SOUL	162
XX. SUNDAY IN BRIXTON PRISON	172
XXI. PRISON CHARACTERS: LETTY COOPER	182
XXII. PRISON MATRONS IN GENERAL: SECOND ARTICLE	190
XXIII. PRISON CHARACTERS: TOWERS	197
XXIV. PRISONERS' FREEMASONRY	204
XXV. EXTRA DUTIES OF MATRONS	211

CHAP.	PAGE
XXVI. PRISON CHARACTERS: ALICE GREY	222
XXVII. TROUBLESOME PRISONERS	232
XXVIII. PRISON CHARACTERS: MARIA COPEs	247
XXIX. THE PRISON SCHOOL	253
XXX. PRISON CHARACTERS: SARAH BAKER, MARY MAY, AND THE JEWESS	264
XXXI. PRISONERS' FANCIES	273
XXXII. PRISON CHARACTERS: GRAHAM	281
XXXIII. THE PRISON LIBRARY	293
XXXIV. PRISON CHARACTERS: ELIZA TRENT	297
XXXV. MAD PRISONERS	302
XXXVI. PRISON CHARACTERS: EDWARDS	311
XXXVII. VISITORS	316
XXXVIII. PRISON CHARACTERS: JANE DUNBABIN, LYDIA CAMBLIN, AND JOHANNAH LENNAN	322
XXXIX. THE INFIRMARY	331
XL. PRISON CHARACTERS: MARY ANN SEAGO AND JONES	338
XLI. FULHAM REFUGE	344
XLII. PRISON CHARACTERS: A LITTLE PRISON MELO- DRAMA	352
XLIII. PRISON CHARACTERS—LIFE-WOMEN: ELIZABETH HARRIS, HANNAH CURTIS, AND MARY JEN- NINGS	359
XLIV. PRISON CHARACTERS: SARAH FEATHERSTONE, MARY M'LEAN, BUTTERWORTH, MARGARET WILLIAMS, JANE WHITE, BENTON, SUSY DUNN, HONOR MATTHEWS, AMELIA MOTT, MARY ANN SMITH, AND EMILY LAWRENCE	366
XLV. PRISON DISCIPLINE: SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVE- MENT THEREIN—CONCLUDING REMARKS	378

FEMALE LIFE IN PRISON

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY

I WISH it to be clearly understood that these are the honest reminiscences of one retired from Government service—that many years of my informant's prison experience enable me to offer my readers a fair statement of life and adventure at Brixton and Millbank prisons, and afford me the opportunity of attempting to convey some faint impression of the strange hearts that beat—perhaps break, a few of them—within the high walls between them and general society. I am anxious to set about this task earnestly, and in a good spirit—I will “nothing extenuate;” I have no reason to “set down aught in malice.” I have the party-feelings of no clique to satisfy, no personal wrongs to seek to vindicate, and I am confident that the relation of these prison incidents can do no harm, and may, by God's help, effect some little good. For I am not alone in my conviction that these stories of

erring and mistaken women—fallen sisters, but still sisters, whom we have no right to cast aside or shrink away from—do in many cases prove that there is no estate so low but that the elements of the better nature are existent, and still struggling for the light. If I have no permission to make these papers public, it is simply for the reason that I have not sought it; my own impression of these documents, after a careful re-perusal of the same, is, that there is not a line that I shall in after-years regret that I have written, or that the directors of Government prisons will, after due consideration, think I was not justified in publishing. I have a few protests to make against prison rules and discipline; I have only one appeal to urge in its proper place on behalf of a hard-worked class; the prison matron who prompts this chronicle is not a woman with a mission or a grievance. From directors, governors, deputy-governors, chaplains, and lady-superintendents, the prison matrons, as a body, have nothing to complain of, and much kindness, and sympathy, and good feeling to be thankful for, in the midst of the constant trial to their physical and mental powers.

I believe I offer, for the first time, a true and impartial chronicle of female prison life; the mystery that has so long surrounded it, the official over-caution, there is no occasion for. The world is anxious to know, and has a right to know, the doings of its unfortunate and its misguided atoms;—shut from the society whose laws our prisoners have outraged, they

are not shut out from public interest, or the prayers of honest men and women.

Whether I am fitted for the task, or have undertaken too much for my strength—whether I have said too much or too little—that world will fairly judge me in good time.

In those details of prison life which I am about to lay before the reader, I shall seldom keep to the anonymous. In those cases where the feelings of prisoners who have been discharged, and are, perhaps, attempting a new life, might be pained by the introduction of their names herein, I have, of course, forborne publicity, and contented myself with fictitious cognomens; but where the truth reflects credit on the woman whose name may at present be associated with all that is vile—or where the truth with respect to some dark natures has no power to harm—or where some characters, well known to the public through the medium of the newspapers, pass again across these troubled pages—I have not scrupled to give real names and dates. I shall be attaining my own ends, and offering a greater pledge of my veracity, by such a course. Prisoners I would no more intentionally pain than prison officers; but from a suspicion of mere book-making, I am anxious, even at so early a stage, to disabuse the public mind.

To avoid book-making, therefore, I shall pass very lightly over the ground trodden by former writers on this subject. I shall not enter into any lengthy

descriptions of the prisons themselves; I will not forget the old copy-book admonition, "Avoid vain repetitions." My task, as I have already intimated, is to describe the life within the cells, not to write a history of the cells themselves; the incidents that evolve from prison duties, not the mere routine which those duties are.

And though the woof may be dark enough—for it is a story of dark places, and of the children of night—yet there will pass across its texture threads of a lighter hue. Prison matrons and prisoners have opportunities occasionally for smiling; and as the sublime, we are told, verges upon the ridiculous, so on the steps of tragedy—the faltering, shadowy steps of the tragedy of crime—a little gleam of light falls here and there. It does not follow that the criminal nature of the deed which has brought upon the actors many years of penal servitude, adds a shade more deep or a despair more utter to the strange outcasts and pariahs of whom this book will treat. There are women in our many prisons mourning over petty thefts, but there are murderesses to all outward appearance defiant, cheerful, and even *light-hearted*.

In conclusion, and as my chief reason for writing this work, let me state that it is the humble officers of our female convict prisons that have the greatest—nay, the only—opportunity of estimating the true character of those whom they may have in charge. Directors may issue their annual reports, the governors of prisons may write their ponderous tomes upon the

question, the chaplains may preach, and pray, and visit, but their opportunities of judging fairly and honestly are few and far between, and they are misled and deceived every week in the year. In men's prisons I believe it is the warder, and in female prisons I am convinced it is the matron, who alone have the power to offer a true picture of prison life. The matrons are in constant communion with the prisoners; seeing them not for a few minutes each in a daily or weekly inspection, but passing their lives in their midst; witnessing each minute some little slip of the mask which on visiting days the more cunning keep before their feelings; and often remarking some weakness, or passionate outburst, or wail over the past, or little trait of character that speaks of the old and better times, which it is not part of a matron's duty to report.

For a matron's duty is to report only offences against discipline; and even where the offence is trivial, much is looked over, and by some gentle-hearted prison authorities expected to be looked over, which even prison rules do not strictly countenance. And of that better side to prison character which a matron has the greatest chance of observing, of that evidence of affection for some kind officer who has screened offenders from a trivial punishment, or has listened to some little story, in impulsive moments, about a mother, sister, brother, or child they loved once, the great report books utter not a word.

The report books bristle with statistics, as the prison

books with sins of omission; Government can tell to a fraction the expenses of these large convict establishments—to a sailor's shirt or a door-mat the amount of work performed in six months—to a man or woman the number who attend chapel, or receive the sacrament, or are confirmed by my Lord Bishop—but of the life within the outward life that Blue Books speak of, and concerning which Parliament debates, there are no records kept.

With a hope of supplying that void in my own humble fashion, of adding my scraps of information, gathered by a prison matron's observation and experience, I have compiled this book. To those who would review it, I assert a right to consider this work as a simple statement of much that has happened in our Government establishments. I trust I have the power to express clearly those thoughts which I wish to convey to the reader; and as to the artistic treatment of this work I am by no means anxious concerning it. I do not ask for any favour from my critics; I merely respectfully suggest that it is the matter, not the style, of the work, which deserves their chief consideration, and that I have done my best to make that matter readable.

It is a faint record of that inner life to which I have recently alluded. I have not attempted to probe too deeply into the strange workings of it, to see always sorrow and repentance therein, or to doubt in all cases the truth and honesty of those under lock and key. I have expressed my own convictions, often related the

matron's own story, in her own words, and left the comments thereon to my reader. I am in many cases still perplexed as to the right motives and the true nature of those whose history I am about to relate. There is but one Book that can fully reveal the awful mystery of such lives!

CHAPTER II.

A PRISONER'S RECEPTION

THE most fitting commencement of my work will be to afford the reader some little idea of the manner in which a prisoner is received at Millbank Prison.

Millbank Prison, or Millbank Penitentiary, needs no very long description in this place, and there are few of my readers who are not aware that it is situated on the Middlesex side of the river Thames, and that it was at the time of which I write a prison for male and female convicts.

In charge of the female compartment were assistant-matrons on probation, assistant-matrons, reception-matron, principal matrons, latterly a chief matron—on whom the practical working of the prison really devolves, but to whom the credit is not invariably given—a lady superintendent, a deputy-governor, and a governor.*

* Since writing the above, the governor and deputy-governor of Millbank Prison ceased to exercise any control in the working of the

The arrival of female prisoners at Millbank was unfortunately almost an every-day occurrence. When prisoners were not arriving from the county gaols—from Gloucester, York, Stafford, &c.—they were coming direct from the Central Criminal Court, &c., with the sentence of the judge still ringing in their ears; or back from Fulham Refuge and Brixton Prison, where they had insulted officers or set the rules of discipline at defiance, and so were returned to Millbank, where there was little association, a stricter silence, and work more hard.

Of the prisoners who make their first appearance on this sombre stage, I desire to speak in this place.

The outer bell being rung, the gatekeeper unlocked and swung open the great gates, inner-grated gates of iron-work were unfastened by second gatekeepers, and the cab, or omnibus, or prison van passed through to the door of the reception-room, where a matron was ready to hear from the custodian of the woman or women he or she may have brought, the name, age, nature of the crime, and length of the sentence—all of which being duly entered in the register, the new arrivals were formally delivered over to the Millbank authorities.

The first inexorable rule to which the new prisoner had to submit, and which is a trial that was always

female portion of the prison. The sole superintendence was vested in Miss Crosgrave, chief matron, *vice* Mrs. Gibson, afterwards lady-superintendent of the new Female Prison, Parkhurst, Isle of Wight, and at a later date of the Female Convict Prison, Woking, from which she retired a few years ago.

hardest to bear, was that of having the hair cut. With a woman new to the rules, a comer who had not sat in that room before, with the scissors of Atropos snipping round her head, this operation was seldom performed without a remonstrance. Women whose hearts had not quailed, perhaps, at the murder of their infants, or the poisoning of their husbands, clasped their hands in horror at this sacrifice of their natural adornment—wept, begged, prayed, occasionally assumed a defiant attitude, resisted to the last, and were finally overcome only by force. It is still one of the most painful tasks of the prison this hair-cutting operation—moreover, it is, in my own opinion at least, a test of character.

One woman will be resigned to her fate on the instant, and, with a Socratic stoicism, will compress her lips, submit herself to the shears, and march away to her bath afterwards in a business-like manner. A second will have a shivering fit over it, a third will weep passionately, and a fourth will pray to be spared the indignity, and implore the matron on her knees to go to the lady-superintendent and state her case for her.

Some women used to be impressed with the idea that coaxing would go a long way towards softening the matron's heart, or at least obtain some relaxation of the rule, and permission to retain a greater length of hair on their heads; and consequently bestowed many "my dears" and "God bless you's" on the operator.

The greatest trouble in my matron's experience of prison life was with an old woman of sixty years of age,

and with about the same number of grey hairs on her head. She was an old prison-bird—had spent two-thirds of her life in confinement, and was as vain of her personal appearance as any girl of seventeen.

“No, Miss Butler,” she said to the operator, after catching sight of the scissors, and drawing herself up with the haughtiness of a duchess—“not this time, if you please, Miss Butler. It can’t be done.”

But Miss Butler replied it could be done, and was absolutely necessary to be done before the prisoner left the room.

“Things have altered a little, Miss Butler, since I saw you last, I can assure you. You’ve no power to touch a hair of my head, mum.”

“How’s that?”

“If you please, mum, I’m married!” and the old woman regarded the matron with undisguised triumph.

“And what’s that to do with it?—sit down—you really must sit down.”

“And what’s that to do with it!” shrieked the old woman indignantly; “*why, it’s my husband’s hair now*, and you daren’t touch it according to law. It belongs to my husband, not to me, and you’ve no right to touch it. Lord bless you, the Queen of England daren’t lay a finger on it now!”

And the old woman’s staunch faith in the laws of her country to protect her grey hairs, would, in any other place, under other circumstances, have been supremely ludicrous. Argument with her was useless

—she did not see that anything more was required after an expression of her opinion—she would not object to the bath, because the law had nothing to say in the matter of baths to married women, but her hair couldn't be touched by any mortal power. When she saw that the matron was totally uninfluenced by her eloquent expositions, she demanded to see the governor—he knew the law of England, of course; and when her hair was cut to the statutable length, she vowed to make a full statement of the case to the directors on the next board meeting, and please put her name down to see those directors at once. Such an infamous violation of the laws of her country she had never been a witness to in her time!

And strange as it may appear, the plea of marriage has been very often urged by prisoners under the same circumstances. “It's my husband's hair” has now become a constant reason why the rules of the prison should be waived in their particular cases. And when it is not urged as a plea, women, whom a repetition of crime has brought back to the old quarters, generally offer, as their first piece of information, that they have been married since their last incarceration. There is a peculiar craving to be considered an “honest married woman,” and the husband, more often than otherwise, is alleged to be in the army—probably out of compliment to the military character of the governor and his deputy.

There have been times, as I have already indirectly mentioned, when a prisoner, resisting all idea of dis-

cipline, will stoutly maintain her determination not to have her hair cut. One woman, from Stafford gaol, persisted in scoffing at all persuasive efforts of the matron, and replying thereto by a torrent of vituperation. She was a tall, powerful woman, with the face of a tigress, and the limbs of an athlete; and one glance was sufficient to convince the matrons in attendance that it was beyond their power to master her. On such occasions the guards on duty in the outer yards, or in the men's prison, were summoned to put the handcuffs on, while the necessary ceremony was gone through. In this case it required three men to secure her wrists whilst her hair was cut the requisite length, she struggling, and cursing, and swearing long after the operation was over—even when she was in her refractory cell, while the gas was burning feebly in the wards, the matron on night duty gliding noiselessly along the passages, and the clock in the yard chiming the early hours of morning.

The prison matron can remember one prisoner delirious for a day and a night after the operation—the mortification of “losing her hair,” or the impression made upon a nature more highly sensitive than ordinary, tending to that unfrequent result. She was a young fair Scotch girl, and her “*Dinna cut my hair—oh! dinna cut my hair!*” rang along the deserted corridors with a plaintive earnestness.

Still, in reality, it is not a barbarous ceremony; it is essentially necessary for cleanliness, and the hair is

not cut to an ungraceful shortness. But the impression left upon the prisoner's mind is not a pleasant one, and I am inclined to think that there are really a few who are more sullen, more doggedly obstinate, or more ferocious, according to their respective natures, from the moment they see their locks of hair strewing the floor of the reception-room.

Woman's vanity, that regard for personal appearance which is inherent in most of the sex, I suppose, does not grow less within a prison; at a more advanced stage, I shall be enabled to offer many curious illustrations of prisoners' vanity, under difficulties which may be readily imagined.

A registry of name, a shortening of hair, a tepid bath, a change from the dress in which they are received to the brown serge, blue check apron, and muslin cap of prison uniform, the key turned upon a cell in "the solitary ward," and "one more unfortunate" would be added to the list of Millbank "arrivals."

CHAPTER III.

A DAY'S ROUTINE

A DAY'S routine in Millbank Prison will eventually save me and the reader much troublesome iteration. It will afford a glimpse of the life that went on day after day, year after year, there; that every-day, toil-

some, wearisome life, which women by their own misdeeds had brought upon themselves. Taken as a class, female prisoners are not unhappy under the monotony of prison service; the liberty of passing to the outer world excepted, they are better off than those women consigned to the tender mercies of the poor-law guardians. They are more cared for, their health is more scrupulously regarded, their food is better, their taskmasters are—if we may believe the cruel reports which shame us as Christians and fellow-men and women—more considerate and kind.

Some day, when the Government takes the case in hand, and workhouses as well as prisons are under its surveillance, so “odious” a comparison may not be drawn; but sad and certain it is that there are, in prison, advantages which are denied to the honest working-classes, who have come at last to the “House.” Two instances of a steady, persistent course of sin in women, who preferred a prison and prison treatment to the workhouse, I shall be enabled to offer in their proper place.

The day at Millbank began at a quarter to six; the guard going off night duty in the yards rang up the prison, and by six o’clock every prisoner was expected to be dressed and standing in her cell, ready to show herself to the matrons on duty in the wards.

At six o’clock the matrons and assistant-matrons passed down the wards, unbolted each inner door, and flung it back to make sure the prisoner was safe and

in health. The cells at Millbank Prison were furnished with two doors,* the outer one formed of an iron grating, through which the matron passed her arm to unbolt the inner. As a rule, they were both secured at night; in exceptional cases the inner one was left open, if the prisoner's health was delicate, or the surgeon or physician doubted the ventilation of the cell. The rattle, rattle of the bolts down the ward had a peculiar effect, and was the first sign of daily life. By that time the matron who had been on night duty had reported everything quiet, or called attention to the fact that there had been a "break out" in the night,—a noisy woman carried to the "dark" by the guards brought in for that purpose,—a sudden illness, or the like. Life began; a certain number of women were let out to clean the flagstones in the wards, with a matron as guard over them; a few of the best-behaved dusted the matron's rooms, and made their beds. The cells by this time were all cleaned and tidied, the bed was carefully folded up, the blankets, rug-shawl, and woman's bonnet placed thereon, the deal table polished, and the stones of the cell scrubbed.

At half-past seven o'clock the cocoa was carried by one of the women to each cell, and a pint of that liquid meted out for the prisoner, by a matron in attendance, together with a four-ounce loaf. Their breakfast finished, and the tin pint scrubbed and polished

* At Brixton Prison there was but one iron door to each cell.

by the prisoner, who retained it in her cell, the work of the day began; the coir-picking for the new-comers, or women who had not passed their probation stage, the bag-making, the making of shirts for the male prisoners, &c. &c. This work at Millbank was carried on by each woman in her separate cell, working silently, passively, and allowed no converse with her fellow-prisoners. At Brixton, where the rule was less stringent,—and where women, whose general conduct for ten months at Millbank had been sufficiently good, were removed,—the work was carried on by two in association in the old prison cells, and in the wing, which portion of the prison was also used as a place of exercise for the women when the wet weather prevented the “airing-grounds” being used.

At a quarter-past nine the chapel bell at Millbank rang the prisoners to the morning service at a quarter to ten—each matron in charge of a ward being responsible for the number of women attending chapel, and the safe return to their cells after the service was over.* At half-past twelve o'clock water was served to the prisoners. At a quarter to one o'clock the dinner-bell was rung, and each prisoner provided with four ounces of boiled meat, half a pound of potatoes, and a six-ounce loaf. After dinner the cans were collected, and coir-picking, shirt-making, &c., proceeded as before, only the voices of the matrons breaking the stillness of the prison. One hour each day at Millbank was allowed

* At Brixton Prison there was also an afternoon service, which at Millbank was devoted to the male portion of the Penitentiary.

for exercise in the airing yards, where the silent system was still enforced. A ward of women was exercised at a time, with a prison matron in attendance. The prisoners walked in Indian file round and round the yard, the matron keeping a careful watch on her flock of black sheep. This occupation of the prison matron was one of the most tedious and monotonous of her daily life—shivering in her bearskin cloak during the winter months, and struggling against the heat in the summer.

For one hour these convicted women tramped unceasingly round the gravelled yard, muttering to each other when at the farthest distance from the matron in attendance, and passing her with demure looks, as though a thought of whispering in defiance of rules had never crossed their minds—plodding on in this mill-horse round for sixty minutes, with the matron at times nodding at her post. My matron remembers once, in the days of her hard service—and that it is a very hard service the next chapter will do its best to prove—falling asleep over her charge, and going far away in her dreams to the country home she had quitted for that prison service. It was in the summer months, and there had been a restless time of it at Millbank—prisoners more obdurate, rash, and defiant, and therefore involving on prison matrons harder work and increased anxiety. Naturally, and very properly, an officer asleep at her post is always liable to suspension from duty and a summons to Parliament Street, or, at least, to the governor's quarters across the yard ;

and such might have been the matron's fate, had not one of the women in passing twitched her lightly by the shawl, and brought her back to consciousness, as the principal entered the airing-yard.

It was a thoughtful action, and as it demonstrates the good feeling that is often experienced by a prisoner for the matron in attendance, I have given it a place here.

After the hour's airing—that is, if the airing had not been already taken in the morning—the women returned to their cells, and worked again till half-past five, when the gruel was served into the “pints” of the prisoners. When the matron's tea was over in the mess-room, a few prayers were read by a matron standing in the centre of each ward, so that her voice could be heard by the prisoners standing at their doors of open iron-work. After prayers each woman answered to a name from the list called out, and then work recommenced—coir-picking, shirt and bag-making—till a quarter to eight, when the scissors were collected; reading, &c., was then allowed, till about half-past eight, when the prisoners proceeded to make their beds. At a quarter to nine o'clock the gas was turned out in the cells by the matron from without, and it was supposed that the matron's duty was over for the day, and that the prisoners were in their beds.

There were a few deviations from this routine in Brixton Prison, but it is scarcely worth while in a book of this description to trouble the reader with them—especially as the difference was not great. The

hours were the same to prisoners and prison matrons at Brixton as at Millbank.

At nine o'clock in the evening the matron on night duty made her appearance, and began her slow rounds of the prison, passing once an hour each cell, and ready at any instant to report sickness or breach of discipline.

Slow, weary hours of prison service were these hours on night duty; pacing the dimly-lighted wards, and listening for a breath or murmur that might be significant of one ill at ease within the cells; checking at times artful signals on the wall between one prisoner and another, or pausing, perhaps, for company's sake, to whisper a "good night" to some one as sleepless as herself; passing in due course to the "dark cells" away from the general prison, and looking in to make sure the woman who had been carried there for breaking her windows, or tearing her blankets, or assaulting her officer, was quite safe; listening, perhaps, to the wild snatches of song that welled thence, and might personify the screeching of some demon, vindictive and defiant, and with no claim upon humanity—striving, perhaps, to reason with her, and being sworn at for her pains, or possibly, just possibly, if she were a favourite of the woman's, persuading her to be silent and to try to sleep.

And so, from night till morning, to and fro, to and fro, like a restless spirit, or a spirit rendered restless by the shadows of crime that may haunt such places at such hours, wandered the matron, till the daylight

filtered through the windows, and struggled with the flickering jets of gas; till the bell clanged in the outer yard, and the matrons, and sub-matrons, and principals woke to the business of another day.

CHAPTER IV.

PRISON MATRONS IN GENERAL

IN my first chapter I spoke of one appeal that I had to make on behalf of a hard-worked class. Before passing to those prison incidents, interesting to all students of human nature, I think it will be necessary to allude to that class in general; to afford some little insight into the duties, trials, and responsibilities of prison matrons, and to get the somewhat unpleasant task of appeal or protest over as speedily as possible.

Millbank Prison used to contain forty-two matrons* —Brixton Prison about thirty-six. The daily average number of female prisoners in Millbank was about 472, and that at Brixton about 620.† Therefore the proportion of officers to prisoners at Millbank was as one to thirteen and one-tenth, and at Brixton one to seventeen. It must not be understood from this that to every seventeen women there was one custodian at Brixton; amongst the thirty-six female officers, men-

* The number of matrons was less after the institution of the Female Prison at Parkhurst.

† On 31st December 1860, there were 486 female convicts in Millbank Prison; 625 in that of Brixton Prison.

tioned above, at Brixton, there were four principal matrons, and one chief matron, whose supervision was less confined to the prisoners than to the subordinate officers; and there were also to be deducted supernumeraries engaged on "flying missions" about the prison, and to whom was not entrusted the charge of a ward. It is the ward officers still who are answerable for the majority of the prisoners, and the proportion invariably stood as one to forty-five or fifty at Brixton, and one to thirty at Millbank. In case of an outbreak, the Brixton matrons did not stand so good a chance of immediate assistance as did the female officers at Millbank, who had the warders of the men's prison within call. Brixton was exclusively a female prison, and, save one gatekeeper, a steward's porter, a cook, an engineer, and two or three workmen, there was no assistance to be procured nearer than that of Brixton station house, a mile, or three-quarters of a mile, lower down the hill.* That, as a matter of common precaution, the staff of matrons should have been increased, I think is evident enough; that, as a matter of common humanity, it should have been at least doubled, I hope to prove as clearly ere the chapter ends. Were the female prisoners as capable—which they fortunately are not—of organising plans for mutiny and revolt as are the male convicts of our

* The surgeon, steward, and chaplain, even if their services could be obtained, lived out of Brixton Prison; and there were three stewards' clerks and one superintendent's clerk at work just without the prison, from nine till four.

Government establishments, there would be even now little chance in our female prisons for the matrons unfortunate enough to be on duty at the time. That there are opportunities to master a whole prison at times and seasons which would be inexpedient to mention here, I have no hesitation in asserting.

Altogether, therefore, in Brixton and Millbank Prisons there were generally some seventy-eight matrons, inclusive of principal matrons, and in these young ladies I am anxious to awaken the reader's interest and sympathy.

The prison matrons are always supposed to have attained the age of five or six-and-twenty years before entering the service, although this rule was not rigidly enforced, and occasionally young fair faces that had not seen one-and-twenty summers appeared in the ranks, to grow aged and careworn before their natural period. The prisons were no place for such innocent and inexperienced youth, and I believe the Directors have now very wisely resolved to enforce more strictly the rule alluded to.

The matrons, as a body, are intelligent, well-educated, earnest young women, chiefly from that class which has seen better days and known happier times; most of them had some sad story to tell of early orphanage, of improvident speculations that brought a family from affluence to beggary — of widowed mothers or sick sisters to support—a few, of husbands who died early, and left them in the world with little

children to work for in some way or other! Now and then a lady's-maid, recommended by a mistress who had a friend on the direction, or in the lady superintendent, used to pass muster, become one of the staff, and was often as well-educated, and made as good a Government servant, as the rest; and even by some means which were unaccountable, an illiterate being would occasionally work her way in, and confuse matters a little with ill-worded and ill-spelt reports. But the last was a rare exception.

The advantages of a service of this kind to respectable young women are still not to be lightly disregarded, notwithstanding that the duties are arduous, and the prisoners not the most cheerful or refined society. An assistant-matron enters the service at a salary of thirty-five pounds per annum—from which salary is deducted three and fourpence a month for the uniform dress—and rises one pound a year. In case of promotion to matron, an event likely to occur in the course of three or four years' service, the salary is forty pounds per annum, with an increase of twenty-five shillings each year; and in the event of rising to the post of principal matron—far from an impossibility before ten years' service is concluded—the salary is fifty pounds per annum, with a yearly increase of one pound ten shillings. Encouragement to persevere in their duties is freely offered to these Government servants, and a life pension awaits them at the end of ten years' service.

All this is indisputably kind and considerate, and stirs up a fair amount of emulation and perseverance amongst the female officers: promotions are not few and far between, and by the Directors in particular, much kindness, and even gentlemanly courtesy, are exhibited. A clever officer rises more rapidly than her contemporaries, promotion going by merit in many cases, in lieu of seniority of service; and there is an instance on record of one assistant-matron rising from the lowest stage to that of deputy superintendent. And it is but fair to state here, that never were honours more justly awarded, or borne with more humility, than in the case of Miss Annie Cook Dyer, late deputy superintendent of Millbank Penitentiary. As a deputy superintendent, she was a favourite with prisoners and officers: she made few enemies and many friends. Her ideas of discipline, and her methods of carrying them out, were those of a woman of genius—the right woman in the right place. The comfort of the prisoners, and the friendship and respect of the prison matrons, were always the first considerations. Still, Miss Dyer formed the one exception to the rule which stopped promotion at the new post of chief matron, and left the posts of deputy superintendent and lady superintendent to be filled from without by lady friends of the direction.*

Why these posts should be filled from without,

* Miss Dyer was really superintendent of Millbank, there being in her time no higher female officer.

when there are in the ranks prison matrons, many peculiarly qualified by experience and long service for the higher positions, I am at a loss to say. The experiment was tried, and was *not* a failure; and though each deputy and lady superintendent now in office has been wisely chosen, and has shown no small aptitude for the onerous post, yet it is scarcely fair to those who have struggled step by step for some ten or twelve years to be told that Government has no further honours to award, and that strangers must take the place to which experienced officers have, in my opinion, a more legal claim. But I suppose it is not in the nature of a Board of Direction to turn a stern countenance to all friendly applicants for the high places in its gift.*

The matron's duties—and to be general, I shall speak of assistant-matrons and matrons under that collective title—may be easily imagined by aid of my attempt to sketch a day of prison routine in the preceding chapter. Their extra duties I will take another opportunity of alluding to. I believe their hours are still from six in the morning till nine in the evening, and very often till ten, three times in the week; on alternate days from six A.M. to six P.M.; the interim between six P.M. and ten being left to their own disposal, in or out of prison. There is a "Sunday out" occasionally, and during the year there are fourteen

* Since the first publication of this book, there have been other instances of the appointment of matrons to deputy superintendents, notably at Woking.

days' holiday, from which are deducted those days of sick leave, which are unfortunately not few and far between—the hours being long, and the service arduous. Against these long hours I have my protest to make, and I earnestly and humbly appeal to those who have the power to alter them—for the better management of the prison, and the sure working of its complex machinery—to do that justice to a class striving honestly and energetically in the service of the State.*

Some years since attention was directed to our daily work in the pages of a weekly periodical—the first effort of a stranger to ameliorate the condition of female servants in Government employ. The effort was marred by the statement that prison matrons worked sixteen hours a-day, when in reality there was a difference of half an hour between his statement and the truth. This, of course, applied to common days, when there was nothing to excite the prison or demand extra attention on the part of its officials. The hours on duty were from six A.M. to nine P.M., as already mentioned; in addition, there was a quarter of an hour for dressing in the morning, also a quarter of an hour after duty for arranging any little matters connected with the business of the ensuing day. Reckoning fifteen and a half hours' duty three days in the week, and twelve and a half on alternate days, an

* The hours have been altered in many instances since this protest was written.

average of fourteen hours a-day was obtained; too much labour—and such labour!—for any woman not blessed with an undue amount of robustness and muscular power.

A few more matrons on the staff at Millbank and Brixton Prisons would have obviated this unnecessary slavery, and not added a costly item to the balance-sheet of prison government. It would have been a saving in the end, for some of the best officers in the prison fell ill after four or five years' service; some broke up altogether, and their places were hard to fill, time being lost in teaching the new assistants who arrived and were put upon probation. Fourteen hours a-day for seven days in the week—for Sunday was not a day of rest to prison matrons, save when it was a Sunday's leave of absence*—fourteen hours a-day, Christian ladies and gentlemen, of unceasing vigilance, with a mind ever strung to its highest degree of tension, and a body that was expected to be ubiquitous. Of the extra duty of removing a prisoner to a refractory cell—of the extra attention likely to be bestowed upon a matron by a vindictive prisoner, in the shape of a pewter pint on the back of the head—of the nights when the past day's excitement, like the Thane of Cawdor, "murders sleep"—of the sudden rousings by the night officer, to see to a woman in some particular ward to which the matron belongs, I say nothing; events foreign to a day's routine happened almost

* Matrons were on duty on Sundays from seven A.M. till nine P.M.

every day, and they added to the fatigue and anxiety of these constant workers.

Women off duty on the *twelve hour* nights often used to fling themselves exhausted on their beds, too tired to take advantage of the fresh air outside, which they were at liberty to seek. I have known young women enter full of health and strength, and depart from the service in a few years aged and anxious looking, with no strength left for any new employment; I have known others die. It is still a service that makes its officers old before their time. It is like no other service under heaven; and a little thought amongst the Directors—thoughtful and kind-hearted men too!—one little dash of the pen from the Secretary of State, and the Exchequer would be but a few hundred pounds poorer in the year, these Government *employées* spared much ill-health, and the Government itself benefited by their longer service and their greater energy.

It is the worst of principles—it is the most cruel as well as the most mistaken policy—to overwork a faithful servant; and particularly when these servants are women who for divers reasons have chosen an ungrateful profession, are interested in it, and anxious—too anxious—to do their very best. If Prison Directors, or Government, or the High Court of Parliament, would but do the very best towards them also!

Throughout all the reports of prison authorities, governors, physicians, surgeons, chaplains, &c., of Brixton and Millbank to the Secretary of State was

evident a timidity to enter upon any topic that suggested extra expense. There were compliments for those who conduct the prison with economy, and a careful governor stood an excellent chance of becoming a director. There was only one suggestion to increase the staff of prison matrons throughout all those dry volumes of fact and figures—skeletons of prison life, with no flesh and blood to make them living, breathing truths—and that suggestion, to his credit be it recorded, came from the Rev. J. H. Moran, late Chaplain of Brixton Prison. Governors, superintendents, even physicians and surgeons, were all silent on this subject, and, as a natural result, Government was apathetic.*

“I think the staff of officers is small,” the chaplain wrote; “and I venture to observe that if the number could be increased it would be a great advantage.” This was followed by a half apology for mentioning the matter to the Directors in Parliament Street.

No notice was taken of this suggestion, and prison matrons came and went with great rapidity. There was some little awkward attempt to account for these secessions; of course there were other causes besides illness, distaste for the arduous service, &c., that thinned the ranks of prison matrons—some had been on probation, it must be understood—but the chief reason was always wanting. In one report it was

* A Royal Commission was held after the publication of this work—and where this work was extensively quoted—and many improvements in prison service resolved upon.

alleged that the resignation of so great a number as twelve matrons in one year was "for reasons affecting their particular convenience, unconnected with the exigencies of the public service!"—a strange excuse for so wholesale a resignation.

The matrons of prisons are never of the grumbling order, however. The hours are known before they enter the service; and woman is sanguine and impulsive, and will not shrink at any task before her. A situation is wanted—a situation that has many advantages is offered—and if it required twenty-four hours' service, instead of fourteen, there would be the same rush of eager applicants.

And in the midst of it all, despite their arduous labours—sometimes their failing health—it is pleasant to see the good feeling existing amongst the female officers; to witness the lasting friendships that are formed between them, and the *entente cordiale* that almost universally prevails. There are little "tiffs" at times; a question of supremacy now and then, some officer asserting her superior dignity with a burlesque majesty that has even its good-tempered side; but there is, on the whole, much love amongst them, as is natural with young women born with loving hearts. I could tell many a story illustrative of their warm affections—of their tenderness, love, and care in sickness and in health—that would interest the reader, but it is not the task I have set myself, and prison matrons as a rule will flit but lightly through these pages;

women made of sterner stuff have to play their troubled parts in the foreground of this shadowy prison life.

Still it is as well that the world should know that these useful, humble servants are doing its hardest and most unthankful work; rewarded for their care of, and often their intense interest in, the prisoners, by an ingratitude that from such women it is but natural to expect. The matrons are cheerful over their tasks; the meetings at the mess-room table are friendly *réunions* that contrast vividly with the darker side of their official position—and bright faces, new to prison life, take the place of the old servants, who have left from choice, or from illness, or to get married.

They are willing servants—faithful, energetic, and thoughtful. Should they be worked too hard, or taken too much advantage of?

CHAPTER V.

PRISONERS IN GENERAL

I SHOULD be sorry to cast any undue romantic interest over the characters of female prisoners, although it will be presently my duty to direct a little attention to certain of these women whose lives have had as much romance in them as most people's. And, indeed, that is not to be wondered at, when it is considered what a tempest-tossed life a woman's must have been to have brought her to this dark estate.

But they are not all heroines mourning over the error of their ways, and the faltering, downward steps that led them to an abyss of crime, and left them there—albeit they may all be women we can pity.

Charles Dickens, in one of his Christmas works, asserts eloquently that, however low they may have fallen, they grasp still in their hands some tufts and shreds of that unfenced precipice from which they fell from good, and that not to pity them is to do wrong to Heaven and man, to time and to eternity. And it is even possible—however deceptive outward appearances may be—that they all retain in their memory some fragmentary yearnings for the better past, the brighter days of their innocence and youth. But to see some of these women hour by hour, and listen to them in their mad defiance, rage, and blasphemy, almost constrains one to believe that they are creatures of another mould and race, born with no idea of God's truth, and destined to die in their own benighted ignorance.

As a class, they are desperately wicked—deceitful, crafty, malicious, lewd, and void of common feeling. With their various temperaments, there are various ways of humouring them into obedience, and sometimes a chance of inducing them to act and think judiciously; but it can be readily imagined that all the vices under the sun are exemplified in these hundreds of women, with but a sparse sprinkling of those virtues which should naturally adorn and dignify womanhood.

“ For men at most differ as Heaven and earth,
But women, worst and best, as Heaven and hell,”

asserts our greatest living poet; and no two lines, I fear, are more true to human nature.

In the penal classes of the male prisons there is not one man to match the worst inmates of our female prisons. There are some women so wholly and entirely bad, that chaplains give them up in despair, prison rules prove failures, and punishment has no effect, save to bring the prisoners to “death’s door,” on the threshold of which their guilty tongues still curse and revile, and one must let them have their way, or see them die. Some women are less easy to tame than the creatures of the jungle, and one is almost sceptical of believing that they have ever known an innocent childhood or a better life. And yet, strange as it may appear, these women are not always in for the worst crimes; there are few, if any, murderesses amongst them; they have been chiefly convicted of theft after theft, accompanied by violence, and they are satanically proud of the offences that have brought them within the jurisdiction of the law.

In the prison the teaching that should have begun with the women in their girlhood is commenced, and exercises, in a few instances, a salutary influence; but ignorance—deep besotting ignorance—is the characteristic of almost every fresh woman on whom the key turns in her cell. It keeps our prisons full, our judges always busy. Three-fourths of our prisoners before

their conviction were unable to read a word, had no knowledge of the Bible or what was in it, had never heard of a Saviour, and only remembered God's name as coupled with a curse. Some women have been trained up to be thieves, and worse than thieves, by their mothers—taking their lessons in crime with a regularity and a persistence that, turned to better things, would have made them loved and honoured all their lives. They have been taught all that was evil, and the evil tree has flourished and borne fruit; it is the hardest task to train so warped and distorted a creation the right and fitting way. Praise be to those hard-working, unflinching prison chaplains who strive their utmost, and are not always unsuccessful; who have occasionally the true repentance of one sinner to counterbalance the ninety and nine who scoff at all contrition, and do not, will not understand, to use their own terms, "what the parsons are driving at."

One of the most embarrassing positions for a well-educated prisoner—a lady thief or swindler—is to mix with these kinds of women. It is an additional torture to her punishment for which she is wholly unprepared. They do not understand her or her ways; at Brixton Prison, where there was association, they would sometimes shun her. There are times even when, singularly enough, they taunt her with her education. "You was larnt better than us, and shouldn't ha' come here," a woman said once. Cleaning their cells and scrubbing the stones appear the hardest

trials. "Oh dear!" a lady prisoner remarked over this kind of labour, "will this do, miss—or shall I try to scrub a little harder? I think I can!"

To hear some of the prisoners' excuses for their appearance in prison would almost induce one to believe in that disease of kleptomania which has been lately talked about—or in some familiar demon or tempter constantly at these poor creatures' elbows, to suggest the profitable nature of sin, and the vanity of all that is upright and honourable. A "returned woman"—that is, a woman who has been let out on her ticket of leave, and has forfeited it by her misconduct—or who has been reconvicted, perhaps under a false name—always asserts that it wasn't to be avoided, *something* made her seek out her old pals, or steal her neighbour's goods again.

"I did try very hard, miss," she will sometimes say to the matron who may be interested in her; and if she believes in that interest, the matron has more power over her and more influence with her than the chaplain. "I did try very hard, but it wasn't to be. I was obliged to steal, or to watch some one there was a chance of stealing from. I did try my best, but it couldn't be helped, and here I am. It wasn't my fault exactly, because I *did* try, you see, miss!"

There are other prisoners not so frank—and these prisoners form the majority—who stoutly maintain, to the last, their innocence of the crime for which they are incarcerated. However indisputable may have been the proofs alleged against them, they are always ill-

used unfortunates, who have been made the victims of a foul conspiracy to place them "in durance vile." They will assert these fabrications to chaplain, superintendent, matrons, and to each other with a cool effrontery that no facts can diminish, and will quarrel upon the point amongst themselves occasionally. And though each is firm to her own story, she believes not a word of anybody else's—"that Ball—or that Matthews—was always such a liar!"

Of the vanity and the mischievous tricks of prison life I will not speak in this chapter; they exemplify so many singular traits of character that they deserve to be treated at greater length than this discursive summary can possibly allow. It is sufficient to say here, that the majority of women are inordinately vain and incorrigibly mischievous.

The most trying ordeal for all prisoners is that of probation—the silent system, as it may almost be termed. That it is simply impossible to make the female prisoners conform to strictly silent rules, or to any rules, for a length of time, all officers of female prisons will bear me out in; there are a restlessness and excitability in the character of these women that make the charge of them infinitely more of a labour and a study than the management of treble the number of men.

The male prisoners are influenced by some amount of reason and forethought, but the female prisoner flies in the very face of prudence, and acts more often like a mad woman than a rational, reflecting human being.

Those who are cunning enough to carry on, by signs, and looks, and tappings on the wall, a correspondence with their neighbours, are less refractory than those of less experience in evading prison rules. Many women, in defiance of a day or two's bread and water, will suddenly shout across the airing yard, or from one cell to another, with a noise all the more vehement for the long restraint to which they have been subjected; and such a proceeding, if remonstrated with, is generally followed by a smashing of windows, and a tearing up of sheets and blankets, that will often affect half a ward with a similar mania, if the delinquent is not speedily carried off to refractory quarters.

It has been long observed that the force of example, in the matter of "breakings out," is sure to be strikingly exemplified; that for the sake of change even, and for that excitement which appears to be part of their being, without which they must go melancholy mad, two or three women will, in a quiet, aggravating manner, arrange for a systematic smashing of windows, and tearing of sheets and blankets.

Women will address their matrons in a style similar to the following:—

"Miss G., I'm going to break out to-night."

"Oh! nonsense—you won't think of any such folly, I'm sure."

Persuasion is generally attempted first, as a "breaking out" disturbs a whole prison for a day or two.

"I'm sure I shall, then."

“What for?”

“Well, I’ve made up my mind—that’s what for. I shall break out to-night—see if I don’t.”

“Has any one offended you, or said anything?”

“No—no. But I *must* break out. It’s so dull here. I’m sure to break out.”

“And then you’ll go to the ‘dark.’”

“I want to go to the ‘dark,’” is the answer.*

And the breaking out often occurs as promised; the glass shatters out of the window frames, strips of sheets and blankets are passed through or left in a heap in the cell, the guards are sent for, and there is a scuffling, and fighting, and scratching, and screaming that Pandemonium might equal, nothing else.

These “breaking-out women” are naturally the most difficult class to deal with—as already observed, severe measures effect but little good, and any humouring, or sign of fear, gives the woman the mastery at once. It is here the superintendent’s judicious care is required, and the gentle but firm remonstrance of an educated woman often produces a good impression upon the listener. It was observed by the late Sir Joshua Jebb that “the most refractory prisoner is not of necessity the worst woman,” a remark which was erroneously attributed to Mrs. Gibson by a writer in the *Cornhill Magazine*, who asserted that it was the exact converse of what he had heard from sagacious

* If a matron really believes the woman’s determination to break out, the prisoner is taken to the “dark” at once.

men in all prisons, and from Mr. Partridge, Secretary of the Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society.*

Still, though it does not follow that the most refractory woman is the worst character of the penal class, yet there are some of the worst women amongst that number. But there are two classes of refractory women—if not more. There is a sullen, dogged, vindictive prisoner, who nurses her fancied wrongs and breaks out on principle, and from whose resolution no prayers or protestations will distract her; and there is the fiery-tempered “refractory,” who, taking offence at a sharp word, or when smarting under a sudden sense of injury or jealousy, goes madly to work at everything breakable and tearable within range at the moment. The latter nature, which is quick to resent offence, is often as quickly sensible to kindness, and, therefore, a kind and judicious treatment will frequently exercise a vast amount of good. Still, such treatment must be of the most delicate kind, and, above all, favouritism must be avoided, for, in studying one too much, fifty others will fall away, or seek to render themselves bad imitations of her. Also, they are keen observers and great mimics, these prisoners, and are not slow to profit by any *ruse* that will promote their interests—advance them nearer to the second and first class, make them “badge-women” and “kitchen-women,” or add a little more to the “gratuities” which

* *Cornhill Magazine* for June 1861. Article—“English Convict System,” page 726.

are waiting for them when their term of service has expired. The breakings out are not always instances of "violent ebullitions of temper," but are actuated by a craving for change—if that change be even to the dark cells—or for anything that will tend to relieve the monotony of existence. Occasionally at Millbank, in troublous times, when the dark cells were known to be already occupied, women would break their windows, strike, or attempt to strike, their officers, for company's sake, knowing that they must have a companion for a day or two; and a companion, even with bread and water by way of diet, was better than silent existence under separate confinement.

The dark cells had been long secretly acknowledged failures. Confinement in these cells was an objectionable punishment; it affected the prisoner's health, it never worked any good, and it did much moral, physical, and even mental injury. It has always appeared, in my eyes, a relic of the old barbarous times, the little-minded style of punishment, as childish in one sense as it was cruel in another.

There are women more difficult to manage than those refractory prisoners; cunning and treacherous women, ever on the alert to take a matron off her guard, or lead another prisoner into trouble. These are the sly, crafty natures, that have no good feelings to be worked upon—that may be observant of all prison rules for years, and then attempt the life of any one to whom they have long borne a grudge—women with

murderous thoughts, who will hide scissors, or jagged pieces of stone, that very mysteriously find their way into the prison, and are surreptitiously used by the women to clean the flagstones in the wards. The prisoners are quick to take advantage of new officers, and lay traps to lead them into some minor breach of rules—involving a fine of half-a-crown or five shillings, and occasionally summary dismissal from the service—women with the cunning of him who deceived our mother Eve.

Then there are the flighty women; the half mad or the wholly mad, who require some careful observation to make sure that they are not acting, and who are at last taken away and are heard of no more.

It may be remarked, as a curious fact, that the prisoners are always the most ill-behaved at Christmas time. At Brixton Prison, it was remarkable that the dark cells were always full on Christmas-day. I have often wondered whether there were any past associations connected with that time to render the mind restless and excitable.

As an instance of some rough sense of justice and good feeling amongst the general body of female prisoners, the following incident, that occurred once at Millbank Prison, may be considered interesting:—

At Millbank the rules were stringent, and, it may be frankly confessed, not always rigidly observed. Little variations on the original rules had gradually crept in, and become almost rules in themselves—now and then the variations were improvements upon the original

idea, and so were tacitly allowed to stand. Each matron, it must be understood, selected a well-behaved prisoner, for a week or fortnight, to attend to her own private room in the ward; and this woman was changed for a second, third, or fourth, according to the turn. Much trust was placed in the prisoner, and very often there was much good faith between her and the matron. It has often happened that a careless officer has left her drawers unlocked, a little trinket, ring, brooch, or earring on her toilet-table, and these acts of forgetfulness were more often the occasion of illustrating the prisoner's honest service than otherwise. Occasionally, of course, a brooch or ring disappeared and was heard of no more; but, as a rule, anything readily purloinable was generally left untouched by the woman in attendance. There were some women so thoroughly honest in this respect that they might be implicitly confided in.

Naturally, then, the matrons had their favourite women; and in the instance to which I allude a woman had been kept a longer time than usual in attendance, to the chagrin of other prisoners as anxious for a little variety to their occupation, if not as equally deserving. Strangely enough, however, it was not a prisoner who reported the matron, but a new and very inexperienced assistant-matron, anxious to demonstrate to the authorities her knowledge of the rules—possibly her sense of what was strictly just.* The matron

* Strictly speaking, the assistant-matron did not report this breach of the rules, but the discussion which arose therefrom between her

was summoned before the governor of the prison, and suspended from office for a certain period—a sentence that, appearing to the fair delinquent extremely harsh and oppressive, considering her offence but the infraction of a rule that had long been “more honoured in the breach than the observance,” led to her impetuous resignation of an appointment which she had filled for some years with tact and judgment. The resignation was accepted, the matron quitted the prison, and the story circulated amongst the prisoners with that celerity which has often perplexed the authorities as to their means of information. The matron who had departed was a favourite among the prisoners, and the assistant-matron’s sense of justice was set down by these rapidly calculating minds to a very different feeling. From the day the news circulated through the prison that the matron had resigned, that assistant-matron was a mark of scorn and derision to every woman in the wards over which the favourite officer had exercised control. Her orders were disobeyed, in defiance of all authority—women rushed at her to strike her—her chance appearance in the airing yard, on which the windows of the cells looked, was the signal one day for the general appearance of the women at their windows, hissing, yelling, and reviling with a vehemence that alarmed the whole prison, and necessitated the withdrawal of the assistant for a few days from active

and her superior officer. Thus the facts of the case as stated came to light.

duty. But prisoners have tenacious memories. On the assistant's reappearance, the same supreme contempt for her was exhibited; and one morning, when the women had been marshalled into chapel, and were awaiting the chaplain's arrival, a sudden rush of the prisoners was made upon the unfortunate object of their anger, and it was only timely assistance that prevented serious injuries befalling her. So persistent, indeed, were the prisoners to take up the cudgels in defence of their matron, and the presence of that particular assistant-matron tended so much to the subversion of all discipline, that it became necessary to remove her from Government service.

Women really diligent, anxious to conform to prison rules, and having some sense of shame at the ignominy of their position—there are some of these characters to leaven a mass of unpliant material—have many little chances of getting on in the present, and doing well in the future. There are breaks in the monotony of their existence; letter-writing days, if they are able to write, and, if not able, they are at liberty to dictate to a woman who can*—days of schooling—days of extra duty out of their cell, in attendance on a matron—days of association, or “palling in,” as they used to term it at Brixton Prison—days of seeing Directors, to make remonstrances or solicit extra favours—days of seeing

* No dictation, save to the schoolmistress, was allowed at Millbank, however. All letters at prisons are seen by the chaplain's clerk, or some other officer, before leaving the prison; and all letters received for prisoners are opened and read by the superintendent's clerk.

the surgeon about their little ailments: Some of these advantages are of course open to the ill-behaved as well as the well-disciplined; and however frivolous the plea, any woman can demand to see the doctor or the Directors. It is a right and privilege, and there are many who, taking undue advantage of it, become no small nuisance to the authorities. Further allusion to these days, and the sad and humorous incidents connected with them, will be made at a later stage of this book.

Of the days most trying to all prisoners are those approaching the time when the locks shall be unfastened, the doors swung wide, and the world once again shall lie before them, where to choose. Days verging on the glorious freedom for which they have pined, and fretted, and prayed for years, and yet which they will grow so awfully indifferent to, as to give them up for a new sentence, and the old miserable life, before their liberty, perhaps, is three months old.

Excitable, dream-like days these are to the prisoners; days of a confused sense of the real and the unreal, under which some thoughtful prisoner, with her heart full of going home, will make strange blunders. Days so excitable that some prisoners will go mad over them, and smash their windows, tear up their needlework after the old frenzied manner, and go back to punishment for the last time—nay, have been, to my knowledge, liberated from the “dark,” and passed thence to the free air and sunshine, possibly all the more

enjoyable for the vivid contrast presented by their late position. But these are exceptional cases; as a rule, the women are well-behaved in the latter days—nervous and confused, proud of the envy with which their companions regard them, but respectful and obedient to all the prison officers. They are most of them going to reform, to lead good lives in the future, to give up all the past associates, whose company and vile example led them astray when they were younger, and had less experience of life, and less knowledge of the difference between right and wrong! Some of them are really imbued with the best intentions, and proceed from prison to the Prisoners' Aid Society; but others have already sketched out a plan of the old life, "with the difference" which is to keep them from the clutch of a police officer. Some women whose expiration of sentence occurs at, or nearly at, the same period of time, arrange a place of meeting and a plan of living by theft, or on those cruel streets wherein, we are told, wander after night-fall, in one city alone, at least forty thousand erring women.

On the day of liberty, women who live in the country are conducted to the railway station, seen into the railway carriage by a prison matron, and their fare paid by Government to the station nearest home; if they are resident in London, a matron accompanies them home, and with a few parting words leaves them with their friends (?). All this is wise, generous, and merciful, and reflects the highest credit on those who framed this portion of our prison rules. While there is amidst

these rules a little to complain of, there is also much to applaud—much evidence of a consideration for the future welfare of society's "offscourings." The satirist has a sneer upon his lip when he terms ours "a paternal government," but it *has* a fatherly interest in its misguided children—and the satirist is not always in the right.

The women, however bad, or however different their ultimate intentions, conform to this rule of the authorities. I can remember but one instance where a woman refused to be given over to her friends in London, and was left at the prison gates to proceed her own way. As an instance of good feeling, I may add that one woman, whose gratuity, after long service, only amounted to a pound—the damage done by prisoners in "breaking out" being deducted from the money they earn—sent fifteen shillings' worth of boots, &c., back to the prison, as a present for one with whom she had "palled in," to be given her on the day of her discharge. "From her loving sister," the packet was labelled, to avoid the rule which allows no presents from a discharged prisoner to another in captivity; and the boots, &c., were delivered in due course. The heroine of this little anecdote "turned up" again within a month of her release, and told the story for herself with much complacency, and with considerable exultation at having "done" the authorities.

Some of these departures are a little trying to the matrons and other officers; a stoical firmness is hard to assume when a woman has really resolved on a new

mode of life, and is departing, sanguine as to her success in the future. The day before her departure she has an interview with the lady superintendent, who is generally the first to apprise her that her time is up—the prisoner is aware of it herself, to the hour and minute—and that the warrant for her release has been received from the office of the Secretary of State. This interview over, the woman returns to her cell, to whisper to her old companions all that the superintendent has told her, and of the good wishes and the warnings she has given her. The next day the chaplain sees her, to make his last effort for her soul's sake; there is the friendly good-bye,—the present of Bible, hymn-book, and prayer-book; then follow the last look round the old cell, the more wistful glance at the matron who has been kind to her, the impulsive or the shy, hesitative stretching forth of the hand towards that officer—it may be against the rules, no matter—the last wishes of the matron, and then, with many to bid her God-speed, she passes from the prison into the air and sunshine—a free woman!

CHAPTER VI.

PRISON CHARACTERS: THE GARNETTS

THE reader will understand that where I do not intimate that I have adopted the anonymous in these outlines of prison character, the real name of the

prisoner is invariably given. In the present instance I have changed the name. The Garnetts were two industrious, hard-working women—they have now gone back to their old homes and their past occupations; and though in their desolate country life it would be a strange marvel for them to come across these records, yet it would not be fair to raise mercilessly the veil.

The Garnetts were mother and daughter—tried at the same time, and for the same crime. They received the same sentence, and were forwarded to the same prison at Millbank. They were tall, thin, angular women, taciturn and grave, who came to serve their sentence out for manslaughter, and who narrowly escaped the charge of murder.

Their crime was the starvation of the younger daughter of the elder prisoner; and the case aroused much public indignation at the time, the evidence of cruelty and privation of food being conclusive, despite the denial of the prisoners. The husband of Susannah Garnett, a shepherd, was also tried for the same offence, but his constant absence from home was looked upon as an extenuating circumstance, and he received but one year's imprisonment. Great stress at the time was laid upon the condition of the other daughters, one of whom—a girl of sixteen—weighed but forty-six and a half pounds a week or two before the trial. The deceased daughter, it was deposed, had been kept without nourishment for two nights, being unable through illness to do her pillow lace, and food being

sternly refused her in consequence by her penurious taskmistresses. Such was the evidence at least of two daughters at the trial, which evidence consigned the mother and elder daughter to prison. "O Lord Jesus, help me to do my work next week!" were the dying words of the victim, it was alleged. There was a counter statement, to the effect that the daughters were actuated by malice, and had sworn falsely; but it was not believed, and mother and daughter were found guilty of manslaughter, and sentenced to four years' penal servitude.

(It may not be amiss to call attention here to a mistake in the "Annual Register" for 1856, where the sentence is recorded as two years' penal servitude.)

They arrived, two pitiable, emaciated creatures, in whom life seemed struggling hard, and whose chance of working out their sentence was doubtful in the extreme. They passed each to a separate cell in a different ward, and parted in a cool, phlegmatic manner, making no parade of feeling.

From the first day of their arrival to the last day of their sentence they were cool and undemonstrative, objecting to any conversation with the other prisoners, expressing more by a vague stare than by words their surprise at prison ways and rules, to all of which they were anxious to conform to the best of their ability. They were civil to their matrons, grateful in their quiet way for a kind word, but shy of speaking, and of eccentric habits.

On prison diet, which was a higher state of living than they had been accustomed to for many years, they began slowly to gather strength, and eventually became more fitted for the work required by the establishment.

In contrast to the slowness, almost torpidity, of her earlier days, the younger Garnett began to exhibit a briskness over her work, and an interest in it, significant of contentment with her position. The famine-haunted look about her keen grey eyes had by this time wholly disappeared. The mother, too, made rapid progress to some semblance of healthy womanhood, and both worked diligently on towards a better position.

Naturally of phlegmatic dispositions, they evinced no concern at their first separation, and made no inquiries concerning each other. Each sat in her cell striving to work her best, and arranging everything around her in that extra methodical manner common to country folk in general.

“Don’t you wish to know how your daughter is getting on?” was asked of the elder Garnett one day.

“She’s getting on very well,” answered the mother; “she be a quiet girl, and no trouble to you, I’m sure, lady.”

“Not much trouble, certainly.”

On the same question being put to the daughter respecting the mother, she looked up quietly from her coir-picking, and hoped mother hadn’t been a-fidgeting! There did not appear any evidence of love between these two strange characters—neither cared to talk

of the other—if there was any balance of affection to be struck between them it was in favour of the mother.

But they were both simple—almost half-witted—country women, in whom all the love, interest, and sympathy that should have naturally existed between such dear relations appeared to have been frozen years ago. Their years had been spent in struggling so hard for a living,—or to save money, denying themselves even the common necessaries of life,—that they had had no thought for home ties and home affections, and had grown too old and stony, both of them, for such weaknesses to flourish in their prison home.

The matrons, who had been brought up after a different fashion,—many of whom had mothers living, whom they went to see on off-nights or on the Sundays,—could not understand this ossification of the affections, and planned in their younger, warmer hearts an apparently chance meeting between the two country women.

Certain prisoners are selected from different wards to serve dinners, &c., in charge of the ward matron; and the two prisoners, mother and daughter, met, for the first time after their incarceration, in the kitchen at Millbank.

It was not intended that any conversation should ensue between them, but it was thought that there would be a pleasant satisfaction to both in their silent meeting, the remembrance of which would help to lighten their solitary labours. The result was a failure.

The coldest and the most unconcerned of glances passed between mother and daughter, there was one slight stare, then renewed application to work, and no second look from one to the other; on the contrary, the most perfect ignoring of each other's presence. They went on with their separate tasks in the old stolid fashion, and showed no signs of any excitement of feeling during that day, or ever once alluded to the circumstance of their meeting.

They seemed perfectly content with their position, and looked forward with no agreeable anticipations to a change. When they thoroughly understood the prison rules, as to the three classes through which prisoners passed at Millbank before becoming eligible for Brixton—the last being a transfer to an association ward—they evinced no satisfaction, expressed no wish to be placed together. Once only was any reference made to the nature of the crime which had placed them in their sad position. It had suggested itself one day to one of the matrons that the elder Garnett was more abstracted, even despondent, than usual, and, with a kindness not uncharacteristic of her class, she asked if anything was troubling her, or if there was anything she wished.

“Oh! no, lady,” she replied at once.

“I thought you were dull.”

“I'm very comfortable, thank you.”

“You are not fretting about the length of your sentence?”

“I’ve nothing to fret about, lady; I’m better off here than I ever was in ——shire. We were all starving there together; and my husband, who was a shepherd, was very ill, and my daughters were weak too, and we had nothing to give them—nothing at all to give them or ourselves, and so my daughter died. But, lady, it wasn’t in our power to help her.”

She appeared a little relieved in mind at this statement, but never again repeated it to any of the matrons under whose charge she was placed. She made no parade of her innocence; only this one simple allusion to it, that sounded to the matrons—who were fair judges of what was real or false—very like the truth. It is almost the only instance where they have fancied there was some mistake in the conviction, and yet prisoners’ protestations of innocence were made every day.

In prison, they were ever quiet, hard-working, religious women, keeping aloof from the other convicts, asking no favour from the authorities, seemingly content with their position.

When they had worked their way to association, they were kindly allowed to occupy one cell, instead of each being placed with a stranger. Their first meeting was after the old apathetic fashion.

“Well, Elizabeth.”

“Well, mother.”

They were seated opposite each other at the table, two minutes after their meeting, working silently and monotonously. There appeared to be no subject

between them on which they cared to converse; they took up their new position without any display of feeling, just as if it had been a prison rule to which they were compelled to conform, and to which they had no particular objection.

After a week's association, a matron asked the daughter whether she was not glad to have her mother as companion.

"Ye-es, lady," was the hesitating answer; "it's a kind of change, but"—with a little impulsive dash—"she do make a great mess and litter, to be sure!"

I am inclined to think that it was this strange, apathetic indifference—this unimpressionability—that was more the cause of the younger child's death than any studied intent to starve her. A natural want of sensibility was evident in both; but it is doubtful if these women were murderesses.

The relation of their habits for a few days is the history of their whole imprisonment—with the same frigidity of demeanour they passed from Millbank to Brixton, wore the special service dress at the latter prison, served out the sentence, and went back to their own old life and desolateness. A little while before departure they expressed some short dry thanks to all who had been kind to them, and then the curtain dropped between them and their prison days.

CHAPTER VII.

SEEING THE DIRECTOR, LADY SUPERINTENDENT, AND
SURGEON

GOVERNMENT has great consideration for its captives; no undue severity, no cruel injustice, can be perpetrated by officers on prisoners. Each woman has the privilege of speaking out, and the right of seeing the Director or the lady-superintendent on certain days of the week. Every Wednesday, at Brixton Prison, a woman with a grievance could leave her cell, accompanied by a principal matron, and repair to the Director's office with her catalogue of wrongs or injuries. The lady superintendent — who, it must be premised, exercises her discretion as to putting down the names of these women—has seen the prisoners a day or two before, and made sure that their questions are not frivolous or objectionable. Some women are only anxious to see the lady superintendent, and have a terror of facing the great authority on prison matters; others, more bold and confident, will see the Director only, and make their statement to that gentleman.

If a prisoner be determined to "go up" on the Director's day with a question she is very well assured will be considered out of course, or the statement of an insult or injury which she is pretty certain will be pooh-poohed by her auditor, the woman will occasionally make a false, yet reasonable, excuse to the

lady superintendent, and pass that way, to surprise that lady during the Director's visit by a statement wholly different. Under these circumstances the woman receives some punishment, and is summarily dismissed from the Director's presence.

Still, punishment or not, it has been a change from the monotony of her position—an hour, or three-quarters of an hour, stolen from the wearisome round of regular duty—something to think about for a day or two hence. The women leave their cells in charge of the matron, as I have observed, and are shown into the superintendent's office, where sit the Director and the lady superintendent. They are seen one at a time—the principal matron and a male officer, or superintendent's messenger, accompanying each woman.

Let us imagine ourselves shadowy witnesses of such an interview.

“Well, Jones, what have you to say to me?” possibly inquires the Director.

“If you please, sir,” dropping a curtsey, “I want to stop away from Fulham—I hear, sir, as how I'm to go on to the Refuge, and I'd rather not go, if you please, sir. Oh! I'd so much rather stop!”

“For what reason?”

“Why, sir, I've never had a report here, sir; and I likes my officer, and knows 'em all like, and am very comfor'ble. And you see, sir, I've a bit of a temper, and shall be all strange and worrited in a new place, and sure to break out, sir, and be sent to Millbank, sir,

again. And if you'll only be so kind as to let me stop, sir."

The Director mentions the advantages of Fulham over Brixton; but the woman expresses her objection more firmly, and perhaps there is a little conversation between the Director and the lady superintendent on the merits of the case.

In a matter of this description the issue is doubtful; now and then a woman receives permission to remain; at times, Brixton is full of women and Fulham the reverse, and, *nolens volens*, the prisoner must go.

When permission to stay has been refused, a woman will occasionally break her windows, and thus, by the laws of the prison, prevent her transfer to the Refuge. This act used to be invariably punished by the removal of the prisoner to Millbank, to the silent system and coir-picking again.

Some women are just as eager to know from the Director why they have not been sent to Fulham, and are anxious to argue the matter with him, that they may prove how fitting they are for the removal, and how well they have always behaved. These women's cases are inquired into, and one is found to be too old (the maximum age is forty years), the health of another is too delicate (strong, healthy women only are received), or some other reason equally in the way of their transfer is discovered.

Occasionally a woman, smarting under her imaginary wrongs, enters into a full detail of the ill-treatment she

has received from Miss R., or Miss W., or the principal—who may be standing at her side. Such a report on her conduct is unjust or exaggerated, or wholly false; she has been always set upon, whilst others just as bad—"fifty times wus, sir"—have been let off, or winked at. Then there's lots of favourites!—and because she don't care to follow suit and curry favour, she's served so, and reported on, and trodden under foot. And all she's got to say is that it had better be altered, that's all—she's stood enough of it!

The Director will inquire into it, the woman shall have every justice, and after the complainant's withdrawal Miss R. or Miss W. is put on her defence.* The Directors, on the whole, are very kind and considerate to the prison matrons, and invariably spare them the humiliation of an explanation before the woman who has a charge to prefer against them. It would be painful to the matron, place her in a false position, and render her more open to similar attacks from badly-disposed prisoners. The explanation, or rather the statement, is soon made; the woman, as a rule, is in the wrong, and has invented the charge as an excuse to see the Director, or with a vague idea of annoying the officer of her division.

Still, such a charge at any time is an exception to the many pleas urged by the prisoners as a ground for leaving their ordinary work; and only the worst of

* One woman who pleaded for an investigation into her report, and was refused, went back to her cell and hanged herself.

women, the most bold or mendacious, face the Director with so extreme a grievance.

If a woman of the latter class, hopeless of favour, and reckless of any punishment, is by any means introduced into the Director's presence, she will express her mind very forcibly, if inelegantly, and in her sweeping accusations or vituperations include the gentleman into whose presence she has been shown. This will be an anecdote to relate with much bravado to her "co-mates" and *sisters* in exile, after her punishment for the offence is over, and by those as bad as herself many compliments will be bestowed for her "pluck" or "game" in what is termed "cheeking the Director."

I may say that nearly two-thirds of the women making application for an interview with the Director have but one question, and only one, to ask—the very natural, anxious question as to the time when their confinement will terminate. They are in for six, eight, or ten years—when will they be at liberty?—on what day and at what hour *exactly*? They are perfectly aware of the day and even the hour, but still, in their particular cases, will not an exception be made to the general rule? One has never had a report; why should she not go out at an earlier period than another who has been always "smashing"? Another has rendered some little service, hindered a breaking out, or perhaps prevented an attack upon a particular matron—won't there be something taken off for *that*?

There are times when the Director, burdened with

so many duties, forgets some little detail of a particular case, and the woman, balked of her information, or put off till that day week, will march sullenly from the room, across the yard, and into her ward and cell, where she will brood over her slight till the strange impulse to do mischief overpowers her, and the broom, or the pewter pint, dashes away at the windows, until superior force is called in to carry her away to the penal ward.

Visits to the lady superintendent are more frequent, and are chiefly made on account of their letters. They ought to have had a letter—"oh! ever so long ago!" Has anything been heard of it—has it been mislaid, or kept back, or what? *

One woman implored the superintendent for some extra work, something to keep her constantly employed. "I am thinking too much now," she said; "everything

* Prisoners are only allowed to receive letters once a month. If a letter arrives for a prisoner before a month has expired from the receipt of the last epistle, it is detained for the full term, unless there are news of a death, when it is given to the prisoner, with a special paper for a reply. Concerning these letters, the late Mr. Henry Mayhew, in his work, "The Great World of London," speaks. He tells of the delight of a woman whose turn to receive a letter has come, her gratitude to the matron who brings it, and her exultation over its news. But there is another side to the picture—the state of excitement, and even dissatisfaction, into which many women fall after the reception of their letters—the "breakings out" that follow the reading—"the restless fever" to which they are subject—even the insolence to which they treat their officers, if any particular home news has proved disagreeable to them. These letters are welcome missives to the prisoners: the days on which they are received are to be marked with a white stone by the women, but with a black one by the matrons in charge.

comes to my mind to worrit me, and persuade me to break the windows, or tear my needlework. Give me something extra to keep me from thinking, or I'm sure to make a smash of it."

Of the minor troubles and the little crosses in prison life the superintendent is also made the recipient, and by her tact, womanly kindness, and keen insight into prison character, soothes many a troubled spirit, and prevents many a threatened outburst.

"Seeing the superintendent" is also an occasional task, and sometimes an unpleasant duty, of the prison matrons. Their complaints are generally concerning little breaches of discipline and the infringement of small privileges: Miss B. ordering about Miss M.'s cleaning or coal women—Miss J. leaving a bolt unfastened or a door unlocked—Miss R. reporting Miss C., &c. Still, these matters are easily settled. Minor faults of omission are punished by deductions from the salary, and little differences on matters personal are speedily adjusted. There is very little quarrelling, and a wondrous amount of good feeling and fellowship amongst this useful body.

"Seeing the doctor" is a pleasant variation from prison routine, and a privilege of which the prisoners in large numbers avail themselves. All classes of women wish to see the doctor: women really ill; women anxious to persuade him that they are falling sick, and require convalescent diet and a change to the infirmary, where the living is good and the rules not

severe ; women with sham complaints, and often with extraordinary and ludicrous applications.

“ I’ve got a pain, sir.”

“ Well, where is your pain ? ”

“ Oh ! all over me—creeps like. I think it’s the work—them militingary trousers, sir.” *

“ Nonsense—nonsense !—you’re well enough.”

“ I’m falling away, sir. Miss —— says she sees a difference herself in me. I should like to go to the infirmary, sir.”

“ I dare say you would.”

“ Or have a little lighter work.”

The prisoner’s plea is pronounced frivolous, and she is withdrawn, muttering her discontent. The matron calls from her book the name of the next prisoner, who steps out from the rank, gives her bonnet to one of her companions to hold, and crosses to where the doctor is sitting to make her complaint. If she is passed on to the infirmary, she returns to the rank rejoicing, with the envious eyes of the other women following her.

The next applicant may make some such absurd statement as the following :—

“ If you please, sir, I’ve got the toothache—such a racking toothache, sir ; my poor head is fit to split.”

The tooth is examined, perhaps some symptom of decay discovered, and a specific promised.

* The making of military trousers by the female prisoners has been discontinued of late years.

Still the woman is not quite satisfied—the root of the evil has not been struck at, and present relief is no cure for future torture.

“I know what the cause is, sir.”

“What is it?”

“It’s all the cocoa, sir. It’s not so good as it used to be, and I’m sure it’s the cocoa. I should like it changed, sir.”

The doctor cannot see how cocoa could have affected this particular prisoner with the toothache, expresses his doubts, and the woman retires, more firmly convinced of her own view of the case than ever.

One of the chief causes of complaint is any infirmity, spot, or blemish likely to affect the personal appearance. A whitlow requires immediate attention, and a sty in the eye engenders as much consternation as a pleurisy. The hair also is a subject of intense anxiety.

The following remarks are not at all unusual :—

“Will you be so good, sir, as to give me something to keep my hair from a-coming off? It ain’t half so thick as it used to be, and I shall go out bald, sir, if you don’t do something. It’s a-coming out in handfuls.”

Or—

“If you please, sir, I’m sorry to say that I found some grey hairs in my head last night. It never happened before, sir. It’s all this dreadful prison that’s turning me grey.”

“I can’t do anything, J.”

“You can give me something to stop it, sir, I hope. It’s very hard that I should be served like this. It isn’t in the rules!” and muttering something about what her friends will think of her, she goes away dissatisfied.

So each woman in turn, with some complaint—one, perhaps, with the whitewash from the wall carefully laid on her tongue, or another with her gums pricked with a needle, to show how very ill she is. About two hours of the doctor’s time are thus taken up every day with the study of these poor benighted creatures’ infirmities, real and fancied.

CHAPTER VIII.

PRISON CHARACTERS: CELESTINA SOMMER

I PURPOSE to intersperse my sketches of prison life with portraits of the more remarkable characters that came beneath the matron’s observation. Such glimpses of life apart from the world, I think, are worth the study, and will be interesting and instructive to the general reader.

In a future chapter I shall offer, under a feigned name, the history of one woman struggling to become better; in the present, without attempting to offer an analysis of the motives under which she acted, I venture

to speak without disguise of one whose name is not likely yet to be forgotten. Celestina Sommer, as the reader is probably aware, stood her trial for the murder of her daughter on the 10th of April 1856. The circumstances of the murder were peculiarly bold and cruel, and the sentence of the court was death—a sentence that, to the surprise and dissatisfaction of the public, was commuted to penal servitude for life; and the criminal, in due course, became an inmate of Millbank Prison, Westminster.

Celestina Sommer was a pale-faced, fair-haired woman, of spare form and below the middle height, a quiet and well-ordered prisoner, holding the other women in detestation, and partial to her own cell and her work therein. Cool and self-possessed, possibly to a certain extent crafty, she soon passed from one stage to another without a report against her general behaviour, and was drafted, after eight or ten months, with other well-behaved women, to Brixton Prison, where the first signs of a deranged mind began to manifest themselves. Throughout the whole time of her incarceration at Millbank and Brixton Prisons, this quiet, grave-faced woman never betrayed any symptoms of remorse at the awful character of a crime which has stamped her trial as one of the most remarkable *causes célèbres* of this country. A thoughtful, though not a sullen woman, I do not believe that the reminiscence of that remorseless deed ever deeply affected her; it was the peculiar character of her madness to forget it,

or, at least, to regard it as an event of no importance to her future welfare.

At Millbank, being once questioned as to her offence by the chaplain, who expressed a hope that she was truly penitent for the heinous crime she had committed, she answered very quickly and readily—

“Oh! of course, I am very sorry! I say a great many prayers a-day, you know. Very sorry, very sorry, indeed!”

The next instant she asked a question wholly irrelevant to the subject, and seemed anxious on a point of religion that did not apply to her particular case. Her religious questions were peculiarly wild and strange, and testified to the gradually weakening character of her mind.

At Brixton she adopted the same taciturn demeanour, showed the same objection to association, and when the society of a fellow-prisoner was pressed upon her, seldom condescended to exchange a word with her. A great portion of her time was spent in the infirmary. In the airing ground of Brixton Prison, where the women used to walk in pairs, and were allowed to converse (a great contrast and a valued boon to the women who had served their ten or twelve months at Millbank), she preferred to walk alone, muttering strange words to herself. Prisoners are keen observers, and are quick to note the weakness or the leading faults of their unhappy cotemporaries. As a class they are strangely wanting in feeling one for another

and this poor, unhappy woman was a subject of amusement to some of them.

It was soon guessed that Celestina Sommer was "not all there," as the phrase runs; and in the airing yard, when she was plodding on in the usual round, with her hands in the cuffs of her sleeves, and walking perhaps at a slower rate than the others, a woman would say—

"Now, Sommer, let us see how fast you can walk for a new apron."

And Celestina would start round the airing ground at an extraordinary rate, until, her movements attracting the attention of the officer in charge, she was stopped, remonstrated with on account of her eccentricities, and the other women reprovèd, and sometimes reported, for teasing her.

Of one thing this strange woman was inordinately vain—she had a firm conviction that her singing was perfection. When an infirmary patient, she was fond of informing the other invalids that she had been one of the opera chorus before her marriage,* and had been a good singer from her childhood—a very good singer, indeed!

"Well, let us hear you sing now," a woman would say, in the absence of the matron; and thus adjured, she would begin at once, in a clear, shrill voice, that

* Whether this assertion was true or not, I have had, of course, no opportunity of ascertaining. It was her own statement, many times repeated, and always with consistency.

rang throughout the infirmary, and into the adjoining offices, from which the infirmary matron had immediately to hasten to still the noise. In chapel, Celestina was orderly in all things save the exercise of her vocal powers. Her desire then appeared to be to drown the voices of the rest of the women, in which she generally succeeded to her own satisfaction, and to the infinite amusement of the prisoners. She kept very good time, and was quick to catch the air, but her notes were harsh and discordant, and grated on a sensitive ear. She appeared to be perfectly unconscious of attracting general attention by her singing, and intensely absorbed in her own manner of delivering the hymn. There was, indeed, an evident self-consciousness that she was performing it admirably, that, under circumstances less sad, would have been amusing to more eye-witnesses than the callous, unimpressionable beings round her at the time.

As her mind became more impaired she became more forgetful of her duties, and oblivious of the prison discipline. Her health degenerated rapidly with her mind, and, in the latter days of her sojourn at Brixton, she seldom passed from the infirmary to her own cell.

At the conclusion of the chaplain's prayers in the infirmary one day, and almost before the last word had escaped him, she broke forth with—

“Yes, my married name is Sommer—but my maiden name was ——,” as though that were the fitting peroration to morning prayers in general.

During her stay at Brixton Prison she evinced great concern at no one calling to see her, and used to fret a great deal at this neglect, or seeming neglect, of attention on the part of those whom she thought dear to her. This was her only trouble whilst her mind retained any semblance of coherent ideas; but a time came when the truth and the false—the real and the unreal—blended themselves inextricably together, and her removal to Fisherton Lunatic Asylum became a matter of necessity.

There are so many attempts to deceive the officers and surgeons by an assumed insanity that on the first symptoms of any eccentricity of manner suspicion is generally aroused. Although this was not the case with Celestina Sommer, still it was necessary to make quite certain that no deceit was practised against the authorities, and hence the reason for her stay at Brixton longer than perhaps the reader has considered just or merciful.

She departed from Brixton to Fisherton, where her unhappy life was brief enough. A sad end to as sad a story as ever darkened the pages of a history of crime. At any other period such a life would have ended at the gallows' foot, and one more weak, suffering woman, would have answered for actions which were wholly unaccountable.

He is an over-wise man who seeks to tell where crime ends and insanity begins.

CHAPTER IX.

PRISONERS' VANITY

“ALL is vanity,” says the preacher; and even within the walls of a prison, where there is no incentive to the encouragement of this universal weakness, it is singular how the old failing, inherent in us from the days of Mother Eve, crops out in arid and unfriendly soil.

The great difference between the male and the female prisoners is this love of display under difficulties. It is a subject almost inexhaustible, and on which a whole volume could be written. Personal appearance is almost wholly disregarded by the men; by the women it seems never forgotten for an instant, inciting them to breach of discipline and defiance of all rule, and making them bold and strategic. Checked too roughly, it leads to violent outbursts of temper that will throw a whole ward into confusion.

To check this vanity, to baffle the many means which prisoners find for their gratification in the indulgence of it, is one of the most trying and incessant task of the prison matron. There are times even, when, with a very vicious woman who has no self-control, and whom physical restraint transforms into a wild beast rather than a human being, a little harmless variation in the arrangement of the hair or the style of the bonnet is tacitly overlooked.

There were some women at Millbank and Brixton Prisons who had undergone every method of punishment,

who had defied, fought against, and worn out those who inflicted it, and who, with health impaired by constant severity, were still as reckless and dangerous as in the days when prison rules were new to them. Kindness, severity, moral reproof, had all been tried and failed, and disciplinarians of the strictest school could do no more with them. Such women are at last humoured by thoughtful prison matrons; there remains no other way to keep them quiet. This may be subversive—is to a certain extent subversive—of true discipline, but a strict observance of the rules would inevitably kill the woman, whose indomitable spirit would last till her dying day.

Therefore, when the case is not a flagrant one—when, by a little toleration, the desperate nature of the woman can be kept in the background, and her evil passions restrained, the matron will not dispute very much with her if she proceeds to the airing ground with her bonnet on the back of her head, or her hair arranged in a method that she considers more becoming to her peculiar style of beauty or ugliness.

In a former chapter I have mentioned the case of a woman scraping the whiting from the walls on to her tongue; not a few of the prisoners make use of the same material to give a clearer appearance to their complexion. At Millbank Prison, I have a recollection of one woman raising the envy of her fellow-prisoners, and startling the authorities, by the very brilliant colour on her cheeks. That her cheeks were painted there was little doubt—I do not think she attempted

to deny it—and in the absence of any colouring matter in her cell or about the prison, the mystery gave rise to much speculation among the prison officers.

This woman kept her secret for some time, and it was only by careful watching that her plan of operation became at last apparent, giving evidence of considerable ingenuity to obtain her ends. It was customary amongst the female prisoners to make the cotton shirts for the male convicts of Millbank—blue cotton shirts, with a red stripe crossing the texture. These stripes, it was afterwards ascertained, the woman had been in the habit of drawing upon, or carefully unravelling, until, a sufficient number of threads being obtained, they were soaked in water, an operation by which a colouring matter was procured, that, transferred to her cheeks, gave them that brilliancy which had excited the envy of her fellow-prisoners.

Great geniuses invariably suffer from imitators; and the fact having become generally known amongst the women, considerable extra-surveillance of the work became imperative. To this day colouring the face is a prevailing weakness amongst the female prisoners; and in their aprons there are a few red threads, which they contrive to make use of when any work from which an abstraction can be made is not forthcoming.

Probably the vainest woman at either of our female Government prisons was one of the name of Mary Ann Ball; a desperate character, with no small share of personal attractions—of which, by the way, she was

perfectly conscious. At the time of her first appearance she was not more than nineteen or twenty years of age, and was a bold, handsome girl. As she will appear in my list of prison characters, I need not dwell upon her here at any length, save as illustrating very strikingly that ingenuity "to make the best of herself" under difficulties to which I have alluded.

The shifts this Ball made use of to attain her ends astonished her cotemporaries. Among her many extraordinary devices were those for obtaining a full skirt; for which purpose she would appropriate the ropes of her hammock, or turn the sheets of her bed into full petticoats. The rapidity with which a new prison dress would, the morning after its receipt, assume a fashionable appearance, was no less remarkable.

A prisoner's dress might certainly with advantage show more grace of outline, and if the waist were not immediately under the arm it would conduce to a more picturesque appearance. Ball was as conscious of these facts as any woman of an observant turn of mind could very well be, and did her best to remedy those governmental defects of style and errors of construction which she considered as peculiarly inelegant. She has been known to receive a prison dress one night, and appear the next morning in a long-waisted, flowing robe, that was the envy of the whole prison; while the tight-fitting pair of stays beneath that gave grace to her figure, considering that stay-bones were not allowed, was a marvel of construction,

It was a long time before Ball's persistence in these minor vanities wore out every one's hopes of bringing her to a sense of the error of her ways. Report led to a breaking out, and the disturbance of the whole prison: her temper being that of one possessed by an evil spirit, and her strength that of a lioness. It became the rule to look leniently on the little indiscretions of Ball. A skilful matron would occasionally reason with her about her full skirts, and humour her out of too great an exhibition of her personal adornments. But if her dress was reduced to conformity with the prison rules, her hair, in all probability, would still be "rolled." And if the arrangement of her hair was in harmony with the general style of the establishment, she would manage even during the darkness of night to turn her bonnet into some novel, perfectly original, and, to herself, satisfactory shape.

Ball was the originator of a peculiar kind of bandle, compounded from the candle, which, in the prison wings of Brixton, was the substitute for gas; and when misbehaviour had reduced her to the penal class, she contrived to make use of the wires—which, at that time, were before the windows of penal class cells—to stiffen her stays, and serve as a substitute for "boning." As the wires were withdrawn only here and there, their disappearance was not immediately discoverable. Indeed, it was not till the ingenious Ball fainted away in chapel one day, a victim to extra tight-lacing, that the misappropriation of the wires—

the undue pressure of which had been the chief reason of her indisposition—was discovered. Almost immediately after this the wires were removed from penal class cell windows.

Ball did more to turn the women's minds, and set them craving after the vanities of life, than all who had preceded her. The example she has left behind has never been forgotten, and I verily believe her ingenious inventions are transmitted from one set of women to another, with a regularity and a method worthy of a better cause.

In Millbank Prison, where the women had not so many opportunities of comparing notes, the same craving for a more becoming appearance would often assert itself. A matron once passing a cell, the outer door of which had been left open one summer night, by order of the doctor, was startled by the appearance at the iron grating of a figure in her night-dress—a poor, delicate woman, who had left her bed to exchange a few words with her. The matron had a candlestick in her hand at the time, and was passing to her own room at the end of the ward.

“Lord bless you, miss!” whined the woman; “I’m so glad to see you to-night—I’ve something on my mind.”

“You must not talk—you’ll disturb the other women.”

“I’ll only whisper it—if you won’t mind just a word, miss.”

“Just a word” is a great boon—an everlasting

favour conferred—with the more grateful of this class, and the matron went nearer the grating to hear her statement. Beginning in a low, lachrymose vein, intended to arouse sympathy and interest in her coming relation, she suddenly darted a long naked arm through the grating, and hooked some of the melted tallow from the candle in the officer's hand.

“It's on'y jist a scrap of tallow for my hair, miss,” said she, applying it to that treasured ornament very rapidly with both hands; “it do get awful rough without fat, to be sure! And I'm very much obliged to you, miss. God bless you!”

And with a triumphant laugh at her own adroitness, she darted from the grating into her bed, and, as the matron proceeded down the ward, she heard her chuckling to herself over her success.

Amongst the women there is a strange craving and an incessant appeal for hair pins.

“If you'll only give me something to keep my hair decent, mum,” they say; and unless the hair-pin is given—a gratuity for which prison rules make no allowance—many a woman will appear at chapel with her hair in disorder, and, by her untidiness, bring on the matron a reprimand from the superintendent. The matrons are responsible for the decent appearance of their women; but it appears never to have suggested itself to the authorities that women's hair *will* grow, and that hair-pins and back-combs are *desiderata* without which a neat and tidy woman is almost an

impossibility. Under these circumstances, the common sense of the matrons constitutes a law for itself, and there is scarcely a woman without a back-comb and a hair-pin or two. String, however, is generally supposed to keep the hair in proper order. Pieces of glass are also as much in request with these women as with a tribe of savages. A woman will break a window for a piece of glass, secure the largest piece in her bed, and mourn over the seeming accident with a display of feeling verging on the histrionic. This accident is often excused, and the cell searched for all the pieces. As a rule, despite the most rigid scrutiny, the woman contrives to conceal one piece. With a background to her glass—a black piece of cloth filched from her work, or the smoke from the gas or candle in her cell—she contrives an apology for a looking-glass, and guards her treasure with jealous care. The possession of a trifle of this kind will often keep the worst woman patient for many weeks—the confiscation thereof will transform her into a Fury.

The women at the prisons have a great objection to the regulation bonnets, large straw bonnets, destitute of trimming, whose peculiar poke-shape would disgust a septuagenarian charwoman. On the other hand, they have quite a love for their caps, which they have an idea become them exceedingly well. The caps of the Brixton prisoners, indeed, were neat little ones, with crimped borders—a striking contrast to the “mobs” of the Millbank women.

Great pains are taken with their caps by the majority of prisoners; and the same ingenuity to make the best of everything is manifested in the sly alterations by which they bring them into conformity with their taste. There is quite a series of fashions during the year with them. One woman will start a new border, or new tucks and plaits behind, with the introduction perhaps of a piece of wire for the better shape thereof; and the fashion, if generally approved of, will be immediately imitated by her companions.

To such an extent was the love of display carried that the Director threatened, if the caps were not left in their original shape, and if they were subjected to such constant alterations and amendments, that white night-caps should be substituted in their place—a terrible threat, which convulsed the prisoners with horror, and, had it been carried out, would probably have resulted in a general break-out.

Fortunately for the proper regulation of the prison the threat was not carried into execution; and the women, I believe, wear the same caps to this day. So, in the midst of this grim prison life, and the duties appertaining to it, the woman's love for dress, and the natural desire to make the best of her appearance, flash out at times, and are not to be kept down. Vanity in a prison cell, and behind an iron grating, but still the same passion that dresses My Lady in silks and satins, and sows the diamonds in her hair.

CHAPTER X.

PRISON CHARACTERS: "TIB"

TIB, we may remark, was the cant name given by prisoners, and occasionally by prison officers, to a strange half-witted girl, sentenced to a term of four years' penal servitude for larceny. As she has left the prison, and, report says, has been married to a respectable costermonger—I am inclined to doubt this report myself—I will not speak of her by her real name, but use her cant appellation.

Tib was about nineteen years of age. Her personal appearance was that of a lumpish girl, of short stature, with a scared expression on a one-sided countenance, that should have been her excuse before any jury in the world. Still, she was a sprightly, high-spirited girl, possessed of considerable strength, and in a paroxysm of passion was capable of running the whole gamut of the Billingsgate vernacular. Her strange fits of temper, and utter defiance of prison rules, rendered her a sore trial to the matrons, and made her sojourn in the dark cells, refractories, and penal wards of Millbank an every-day occurrence.

Tib was always in trouble; she made few friends, for she was as abusive and quarrelsome with her fellow-prisoners as with the officers. When she was in a bad temper she would tear up sheets, and smash the windows with pints, until the canvas jacket was put

on her; when she was in a good temper her pranks were more those of a monkey than of a human being at any age.

A favourite amusement of Tib's, when proceeding to chapel, was to tread on the heels of the woman preceding her, pull her hair or the back of her bonnet, thrust playfully a pin into any part of her person that might be handy for the purpose, and almost choke herself with suppressed laughter at the indignation aroused. In chapel it was a matter of impossibility to keep her decorous; she would shift uneasily in her seat, fidget with her feet, drop her hymn-book, whisper frequently to her neighbour, stand up at unreasonable periods, or struggle hard with the next woman—who perhaps had sought to bring her back to her seat by jerking at the skirt of her dress.

Her power of grimace was something remarkable. Her facial contortions would convulse a whole ward with laughter.

Her conversation was rational enough at times, but all the preaching at her, or praying with her, the moral reflections of chaplain and Scripture-readers, the earnest efforts of the prison matrons, superintendent, and even of the governor, to keep her steady, proved entirely nugatory. Tib would promise anything with the gravest face and the most vehement protestations, and half an hour afterwards forget the circumstance, and be as uproarious and unruly as ever. Sheer wantonness seemed more often the incentive to her various eccen-

tricitities than any violent ebullition of temper ; she was easily "put out," but even when she was not in the state so described, her behaviour was about the same.

"It's such a jolly breeze, miss!" she would say, exultingly, as she danced about her cell, after breaking all her windows, smashing her table, strewing the floor with fragments of sheets, blankets, and rug, and winding up with an onslaught on her own personal apparel. "Have the men been sent for yet?"

The men *had* been sent for, and presently they would arrive, and away went Tib to the dark cell, fighting, shrieking, and laughing all the way. On her term of "durance vile" coming to an end, she would return rather more pale and weak to her cell, and, after a day or two's rest, recommence all her old tricks.

In the airing yard she was the leading comedian of her division—dancing, shuffling, hopping, doing anything but walking in that staid manner required of prisoners during the recreation hour. As she made a feint of passing the matron in a very orderly manner, the more experienced officer who might be on duty chose to ignore her minor escapades. She had long ago been given up as unteachable and unmanageable; and it was only extra misbehaviour that shut her in the dark, or put her canvas jacket on.

During the winter time, one day in the airing yard at Millbank, the heavy snow of some two or three days previous had been shovelled on each side of the path, forming two high banks of snow, between which the women

proceeded one by one, Tib prancing along in her turn after the old fashion, giving mischievous pushes behind to the prisoner in advance, and indulging in little suppressed shrieks of laughter whenever the foot of the woman, taken off her guard, went deep into the snow.

"Don't do that again, or I'll send you silly with a backhander," muttered the woman at last.

"Why, Egan, it don't hurt?"

"Don't do it again."

"I would not mind jumping in it, head over heels, I wouldn't!"

"Let's see you."

"Wait till we've passed Miss F——, and see if I don't, if you dare me."

"I dare you, Tib!"

The women passed along the path, made at an earlier hour by the male prisoners, went round by the wall, and back again past the matron, shivering in her bear-skin; the news spreading, mysteriously and swiftly, to the very end of the line, that Tib was going to jump into the snow-bank.

And when the women were all on the watch, Tib kept her word, and, giving a sudden rush from the ranks, took "a header" into the snow, completely disappearing for a moment, amidst the shrieks and uproarious laughter of her companions.

In such moments of hilarity, which are grave breaches of discipline, the matron calls "All in" at once, and curtails the hour's promenade. For this pantomimic

feat on the part of Tib, the "ward" was sent indoors, and the key turned on each woman. I believe Tib was reported for this offence, but very lightly punished, as her good tempers had set in, and it was considered advisable not to interfere too much with her.

During the latter days of Tib's stay at Millbank she began to show many signs of improvement, thanks to the care of a thoughtful matron under whose charge she was placed. This matron was a fair judge of character, and adopted a different method with the incorrigible Tib. She conceived the idea of a special treatment applicable to her case, and with considerable gentleness and tact gradually mollified the hitherto ungovernable woman. She reasoned with her, even humoured her out of her most violent intentions, gave her all that kind advice which, without infraction of the rules, a prison matron can offer to a prisoner, and finally developed in Tib a trait of character for which no one at Millbank gave so unruly a creature credit. Tib began to evince gratitude for the interest shown in her, and gradually yielded to the influence of kindness. She would be concerned at even a temporary absence of her favourite officer, for whom she demonstrated a wild, passionate affection. She would submit to her orders, but refused to obey those of anybody else. This was an improvement, however, and that particular ward wherein she was a prisoner became quite a different place, now Tib had become a different being.

This is a remarkable instance of what may be effected

by a clever matron, who can exercise patience, judgment, and gentleness in her treatment of a prisoner.

The attempt to tame this woman was as doubtful an experiment as the taming of a wild beast, and yet the matron by a little perseverance succeeded in her object. Sir Joshua Jebb has very wisely drawn a distinction between the treatment of male and female prisoners: "Male convicts must be treated in masses rather than according to their individual character. Individuality must be more regarded with female convicts." If this advice were more constantly borne in mind by the matrons, much good would inevitably follow. It is the treating in masses—the want of judgment in a matron, here and there, to distinguish the true method, to say the right word in the right place, to vary the application of the rules according to the different characters of the prisoners, that brings about much inevitable harm. When a matron shows judgment in these matters—and it is but fair to say that she very often does—she becomes a valuable servant of the State. When the gift of discretion is wanting, she does more harm to true discipline than a refractory woman.

The affection of Tib became rather embarrassing to the matron, it was so demonstrative and exacting. She became jealous if any remarks were made to other prisoners, and was always threatening to break out if Miss —— spoke to that ugly Edmunds or that brute Pugh. Still she only threatened, and a word or smile from the favourite ocerffi kept her in check.

When the matron fell sick for a few days, Tib's passion burst out again, and brought her to the refractory; and it was only in consequence of her threat never to be quiet again if she were not returned to the same ward, that it was thought advisable to transfer her to her old quarters.

Early in the summer the matron took her leave of absence. Before her departure she had a little talk with Tib—expressed her hope that she would be a good girl during her absence, and told her how grieved she would be to find her again amongst the refractories on her return.

“Do you mean to say ye'd really be sorry now? Upon your word and honour!”

“Upon my word, I should.”

“Then I won't break out till ye come back,” she said, with her usual half-idiotic laugh; “I won't have a single report—I'll be so precious good!”

And she kept her word. On the matron's return, Tib was in the same cell, working diligently, and earning a better name than her antecedents had appeared likely to warrant.

“I told ye I'd keep good, miss. Oh! I've had such mighty hard work to do it, though!” she exclaimed.

At chapel every morning Tib insisted upon carrying the matron's prayer-book, and was grave and decorous all the service if allowed to sit by her side, furtively holding the fringe of her shawl in her hand. Hers was almost the affection of an animal for a kind mistress,

and the jealousy with which she resented any approach of another prisoner to her favourite officer partook of the same character.

Tib, finally, behaved so well, that the order for her transmission to Brixton was made out—her time having expired, and her conduct during the past few months having rendered her eligible for that agreeable change.

She received the news with anything but gratification. The order for Brixton might have been her death-warrant for all the satisfaction she exhibited.

"I won't go, miss," she said confidentially; "I'll never go to Brixton, mind!"

"But you'll have so much liberty there; and association, too, Tib."

Tib anathematised the extra liberty and the association with a vehemence that testified still to a deficiency of moral restraint, and took a few oaths on the spot, before the matron could check her, that no earthly force should remove her from Millbank.

That night, or the next day, she smashed every pane of glass in her cell, demolished her table, tore her sheets and blankets, took to singing extempore songs denunciatory of the governor, superintendent, and chaplain, and, as a matter of course, was removed in the old fashion to the "dark." The reason for her breaking out was reported to the authorities, and after some consideration it was resolved that she should be passed over to Brixton, despite her attempt to evade the change, and so her *ruse* proved unavailing for the nonce.

“Never mind,” were Tib’s last words; “if they won’t let me stop with my dear Miss —— now, I’ll find my way back. They can take me there,” she added cunningly, “but the devil’s in me if they can make me stop!”

And accordingly she began her old plan of action immediately upon her arrival at the Surrey prison—breaking windows, tearing blankets, indulging in the most blasphemous language, even fighting with the woman put in association with her, and winding up by flinging her pewter pint at the matron’s head. Tib was pronounced incorrigible, unworthy the company of the better-disposed women, and packed back to Millbank to learn better behaviour for the future.

She was again placed on probation, and by degrees worked her way back to the ward of which her favourite matron held possession. Her first words were—

“I said I’d come back!” before she burst into tears at the sight of the friendly matron’s face.

Tib oscillated between Millbank and Brixton during the remainder of her sentence—obedient at Millbank, and altogether unruly at the latter prison.

Brixton officers attempted the Millbank matron’s style of treatment with her, but wholly failed. The superintendent reasoned with her in vain—Tib would remain constant to her first love, and would have no kindness or favour from any one else. She worked her time and went away.

A few months after her departure, an old prisoner made her reappearance at Millbank to undergo a new sentence.

“I suppose you haven’t forgotten ‘Tib?’” was her inquiry on first meeting with ‘Tib’s old officer.

“Oh! no! I have not forgotten her.”

“She’s gone and got married to a costermonger.”

“She’s doing well, I hope?”

“She’s a-going on about the same as usual. You’ll have her back before a couple of months.”

The prophecy, however, has not come true yet. But old faces do come back, and take their places in our midst; and such weak sisters as ‘Tib are almost certain to appear again—governed by a nature that exults in non-repentance, and swayed by the fierce impulse that drives them on to wrong. Still ‘Tib has *not* appeared yet, and it is fair,—it is merciful,—to hope ever for the best.*

CHAPTER XI.

“BREAKINGS OUT”

IN the preceding pages I have alluded so much to what is termed “breaking out,” and shall, as a matter of necessity, have to allude so often to it in my future illustrations of prison life, that it may be as well, before proceeding further, to devote a little time to a description of its manifold workings and results, that we may see if any glimpse of the true reasons for these frequent

* It is a sad footnote to add to this sketch of prison character that ‘Tib has reappeared!

outbursts can be ascertained. "Breakings out," which is peculiar to English female prisoners,* is altogether distinct from the raving and violence of the inmates of a lunatic asylum, and appears very often to be a motiveless frenzy.

In 1859 the governor of Millbank Prison, in his Report, appeared to regard it as an insolvable mystery.

"I am satisfied," he writes to the Directors of Government Prisons, "that every inducement consistent with discipline is held out to these unfortunate and unreasonable creatures, whose conduct at times is quite unaccountable and trying to those placed over them."

Superintendents and chaplains appear to take the same view. Kindness, good feeling, interest, encouragement to good, are exhibited in vain; amongst a certain class of women it appears as much a necessity to act in a manner utterly at variance with common sense and decency as it is to breathe and live.

I think we should go a little deeper than the surface to account for these violent displays of temper, and consider the prisoners' probable nature and habits before the prison gates, clanging upon them, shut them from society. Freedom with them was the liberty of the wild beast—free to roam anywhere, uncared for and unchecked; left to wander in the darkness with-

* This assertion appears to be doubted by my friendly critic in the *Times* of September 23, 1862. It was a remark not written hastily, numerous inquiries having been first made of those who had visited the prisons on the Continent. France and Germany, it appears, are at least free from these strange prison outbreaks.

out one helping hand stretched forth to lead them to a brighter life; no honest example ever before them; but the path of evil they were to follow, clearly indicated by all with whom their lives were brought into contact. Evil and crime must follow in due course from the awful ignorance, almost brute-like in its character, which characterises these women.

Amongst the statistics with which the prison reports bristle there is always one sad proof of the ignorance prevailing, as shown in the following tabular form, taken from an old Report:—

Ignorant.	Can read only.	Both imperfectly.	Both well.
Females . 93	104	105	22
Juveniles . 3	1	2	...

The worst women are found amongst those that come under the first category. From the last we obtain our model prisoners. The former comprises the greater number of the penal class, who, in the same report, are distinguished, according to their behaviour, as good, bad, or indifferent. How grim are the facts disclosed by these figures, insensibly reminding one of the Gradgrind school of explanation.

	Good.	Indifferent.	Bad.
Penal Class	4	8	33

Possibly, thanks to this age of education, the prison

books of future days will not contain so much to show the fruits of this soul-besetting ignorance. Ignorance is the mother of crime, and when

“ There’s not a crime
But takes its proper change out still in crime,
If once rung on the counter of the world ”—

the terrible result is easily guessed at.

Ignorance is in a great degree accountable for these breakings out. There is no reasoning with women in whom reason appears to be little more than a brute instinct. Long years of evil courses have so hardened their hearts that they are almost impenetrable to the benevolent attempts made to work a change in them. Their lessons have only been learned in the Devil’s school, and that evil master burns his letters in.

Ignorance, however, is not always sufficient to explain the conduct of breakers out. Here and there a woman who has been carefully brought up, who can read and write well, who has had good parents and wise counsellors, and yet has gone wrong, follows the example of her disorderly companions, and becomes as unruly as the rest. Amongst the more educated female class beyond our prisons are there not ungovernable tempers, rash hands to destroy in a passion the valuable and fragile? Shakespeare, at the head of the portrait-painters of our poor humanity, has shown us one or two. In prison the example of breaking out is displayed so often, and the monotony becomes, to a wild spirit, so wearisome and heart-breaking, that to disturb the still-

ness of their dreary abode, and to give some animation to the unvarying round of their enforced duties, the offence is committed, and the glass is shattered by the pewter pints!

One break out is almost sure to be followed by another; for the pulse beats high in these caged natures, and their blood is soon warmed by tumult and excitement.

A matron, of a somewhat impulsive disposition—who has since left the service—once told me in confidence, and with a comical expression of horror on her countenance, that she was afraid she should break out herself, the temptation appeared so irresistible.

“I have been used to so different a life—father, mother, brothers, and sisters all round me, light-hearted and happy—that it’s like becoming a prisoner oneself to follow this tedious and incessant occupation. I assure you, that when I hear the glass shattering, and the women screaming, my temples throb, my ears tingle, and I want to break something,—dreadfully!”

I believe I have already remarked that some of these “breakings out” are parts of a cool, deliberate attempt to obtain removal to a dark or refractory cell, adjacent to a favourite companion who has recently committed a similar offence. At both prisons madness is very often feigned, and windows and tables are broken for the sake of fellowship both night and day; and occasionally there are suspicions of unfair treatment, slights and jealousies, to render the woman’s

actions somewhat consistent with her feelings. With the malicious, it is a morbid satisfaction to destroy prison property. "I'll serve 'em out for putting me in here!" is often the remark with which an act of wholesale damage is accompanied.

In one year at Millbank Prison, one hundred and fifty-four cases of destruction of prison property occurred; and there were some women so desperately wicked—so resolved to resist all efforts to make them less abandoned or intemperate than they have always been—that it was often necessary to lay four or five reports in the course of a week, for two months in succession, before the superintendent, in order to keep up anything like a semblance of discipline in the wards to which these women belonged.

In former days women were contented with tearing their blankets into a few strips; but as these fragments were available for "prison flannels" it became a general rule to devote a little more time to the work of demolition, so as to make quite certain that the infinitesimal portions should render no further service to the State. In the refractory cells the custom of tearing up a pair of blankets a night became so general, and this studied demolition entailed so important an item in the prison expenses, that it was suggested by a late deputy superintendent of Millbank that sacking sheets, stitched with string, which would baffle all destructive propensities, should be used. The demolition of these being a trying ordeal

for the finger-nails, they answered well for a time, until one woman, more crafty than her fellow-prisoners, made a feint of destroying her dinner-can, concealing one strip of the metal, which she sharpened during the night; she with this murderous instrument cut up the sacking with great exultation, and called attention to her success in the morning.*

Some of the boldest women even make attempts to set their cells on fire when the gas is lighted, and have so far succeeded as to have conceived great fear of being roasted alive before help arrived, and have therefore startled the whole prison with their clamours for release.

The strength of some of these women, during their fits of frenzy, is greatly in excess of the men's. It always required two, very often three, of the guards to force one fighting, plunging woman from her cell to the "dark," tables and bedsteads snapping under their hands like splints of firewood. One woman named M'Williams—a woman of small stature, but of extraordinary strength—succeeded one night at Brixton in wrenching the inner door of a dark cell completely off its hinges.

The same woman, in concert with two other desperate prisoners, was agent in a studied plan for breaking out at Brixton, that caused considerable astonishment and damage. The ringleader was a woman of the name of

* It may be added that this incident occurred through a breach of the rules on the part of the prison matron, no prisoner being allowed a tin dinner-can in a refractory or dark cell.

Mary Nicholas, of a treacherous and vindictive character, who, having an objection to being passed over to the Wing, resolved to have a break out in consequence, and to lead others into the same mischief as herself. M^cWilliams, who was going to the Wing also, preferring her old quarters, the plan was first arranged between her and Nicholas, the third woman being afterwards enlisted as an able and willing recruit to aid them in their scheme. M^cWilliams and Nicholas on one occasion were carrying water through the ward, when an opportunity for action seemed suddenly to present itself. The ward adjacent was being ventilated, and the cells being vacant at the time, the officer in charge of the prisoners had entered one for an instant, when Nicholas suddenly closed the door upon her—thus, as it opened only on the outside, rendering her confinement there for a few minutes imperative. Taking advantage of these few minutes, the two women made a dash down the ward, smashing every window in their way, enlisting the recruit already mentioned, who lent her willing services, the matron all the time rattling away at her cell door, and calling out for assistance. Three women intent on breaking windows can soon create formidable havoc; and every pane of the two wards—the occupied and the unoccupied—being shortly shivered, they turned their attention to the windows of the empty cells of the ward under process of ventilation, and darting from one to another, rapidly destroyed all the windows.

The first matron who came upon this scene of demolition proved herself an able officer; for, following close upon the footsteps of the three women, she allowed them to rush into the empty cells, and managed to close the doors upon two of them—thus caging them, as the prisoners had previously caged the matron. By this time assistance had arrived; the riot was suppressed, and its fomenters were speedily secured.

I believe this is the most wholesale case of “smashing” preserved in prison records, close on three hundred and fifty panes of glass having been destroyed by those destructive hands. It was a grand breaking out, an exploit of which, I have no doubt, these women are proud to this day, and which is probably related as a pleasant anecdote of their prison experience to those friends and acquaintances to whom they have returned.

Some women are very methodical in their “breakings out.” I remember one desperate woman, named M’Dermot, who, having first smashed her windows, was caught in the usual act of destroying her blanket, by the men, who had arrived rather more promptly than she had anticipated.

“Hollo!” was her salutation; “you’re in a hurry this morning! Just wait, there’s good fellows, till I’ve finished my blanket. I won’t keep you more than half a minute.”

And having finished her blanket, as the circulars say, “with promptitude and despatch,” she allowed herself to be led off to the “dark” like a lamb.

I think I may venture to suggest here, that the treatment of the male officers to these wild demented creatures might at times be a trifle more gentle. There are some male officers who can keep their temper after a scratch down the cheeks, or in face of the resistance generally made to their efforts to remove a prisoner; but there are others, not few and far between, who are cruel and vindictive, using their giant's strength tyrannously, and like a giant. This is my opinion, at least, and perhaps these few remarks may lead the "heads of office" to ask present matrons their opinion on the subject.

I may mention another memorable instance of violence, accompanied with method, which occurred at Millbank Prison. A woman, after committing the usual amount of damage with glass, sheets, and blanket, contrived very ingeniously to keep out the officers by barricading the door with table, bedstead, &c., and, by the addition of her own weight, prevented it from being opened inwards for a considerable time.*

Another woman, adopting a similar method of defence, armed herself in addition with the leg of the table which she had demolished, and administered some very stout raps on the heads of the male officers when they broke at last into her cell.

All these acts are the angry waves upon the turbulent sea of prison life; the waves that are never still.

* The doors of Millbank cells opened inwards, those of Brixton outwards.

CHAPTER XII

"THE DARK"

By way of sequel to the preceding chapter, I will devote the present to a few remarks on the punishment that used to follow the breaking out of refractory women.

The dark cells were six in number at Millbank Prison; at Brixton there were really none, but there were sixteen refractory cells, which were termed the penal ward. A few of these cells, possessing a less amount of accommodation than the others, had perforated gratings in lieu of windows, and by prisoners and prison officers were generally known as "the darks." For the sake of generality, I will term them "darks" when speaking of either prison in the present chapter.

Four of the dark cells at Millbank, in a kind of lobby, apart from the prisoners' wards, were firmly secured by formidable doors and iron gratings, and were covered by a sliding pad the size of the outer door, which tended in a great degree to stifle the uproarious sounds that generally proceeded from each cell, until the woman from sheer exhaustion flung herself on the ground, or coiling herself in her two blankets and rug, fell asleep at last on her sloping plank of a couch.

The furniture of a dark cell mainly consisted of a

slanting series of boards by way of bedstead, with an uncomfortable wooden block for a pillow—hard quarters for the worst of women, and, with a bread and water diet, telling rapidly upon a prisoner's health.

Some of the dark cells were, with an ingenious perversion of common humanity, placed either above, below, or beside the matron's quarters. At Millbank the cell was immediately below; and the tired officer was often kept awake all night by that incessant shrieking, hammering, kicking, and singing in which the confined woman indulged while a spark of strength remained in her system.

This system of slow torture was termed by the inmates of the dark cells "keeping it up while the screws are in bed."

It is a striking proof of the power of habit that even the prison matrons became accustomed to this trial of their nerves. The ordeal to be passed through, however, before the nerves were sufficiently strung or the senses deadened, was a painful one, and not a few broke down under it; but constant contiguity with the prisoners gradually produced its effect, and a woman in the dark cells became a matter of very little concern. It was an event that happened every day; the noises in the night were to be expected and prepared against; and the matron, tired with her long duties, was glad to find herself under any circumstances in her welcome bed.

If the prisoner were more than usually vociferous,

the matron turned a little more restlessly in her bed—woke up suddenly, and listened for a while, perhaps to make sure that nothing unusual had occurred; and then dropped off again to dream of the home she once had—of the friends that were round her in the old time, and who little dreamed that her proud spirit would ever seek this profession rather than be a burden to them—of the mother's face looking in upon her trouble, and so like the life it quitted years ago! whilst, mingling with her dreams, the thump, thump of the prisoner's feet and hands continued with incessant monotony, or the defiant song of the caged tigress welled up from her cell.

The diet of a woman in the dark cells was generally bread and water—unless her health had been already greatly impaired; and this treatment was continued, according to the nature of her offence, unless any sudden signs of ill-health presented themselves. I cannot say that these "darks" have ever produced in any single instance a salutary effect upon the prisoner, although it is difficult to suggest a more proper mode of punishment. A remnant of the barbarous style of coercion peculiar to the Middle Ages, it was generally found to be unavailing for any good purpose. In the case of the strong it only proved that the woman had the power to tire out her punishers; while with the weak, constant and strict confinement was found speedily to affect the mind.*

* The dark cells no longer appertain to prison discipline.

Every precaution was taken with the prisoners in the "dark." They were carefully watched and constantly visited. The night officer on duty had to pass each cell once an hour, and make sure that the woman was well; and the surgeon visited her once a-day.

Meanwhile, as a general rule, the prisoner continued defiant to the last. Every night a pair of blankets and a rug were given in to her—every morning the blankets were found torn to shreds, and very often the rug, which was of tough material, and more trying to the fingers. The food which was given in to her was tossed out again, and the water flung in the matron's face. The singing and raving continued till she was entirely exhausted. The length of time in the "dark" varied considerably. With some women the maximum punishment was two days, however heinous might have been the offence; with more powerful prisoners, I have known twenty-eight days borne with perfect indifference. Nevertheless, confinement there told at last upon all; none could struggle long against it.

At Millbank Prison there occurred once a humorous incident connected with these dark cells. It became known amongst the prisoners that they were full of refractory women, and that any more "smashing" must perforce place the delinquents in temporary association. Millbank Prison, as the reader is aware, being mainly conducted on the silent system, there was amongst some of the women a great inducement

to break out. If bread and water and a dark cell were not agreeable, a companion to talk, plot, and compare notes with was desirable! In this instance the windows were shivered right and left for the sake of future companionship; and, for the tranquillity of the ward in which these outbreaks occurred, so many women were carried from their cells to the “dark” and the refractories, that there were two—in some cases three—in each cell.

It happened that, from one particular dark cell adjoining a portion of the pentagon belonging to the men’s prison, the most piteous screams and cries for help were suddenly heard to issue. The matron in attendance hurried to the “dark,” and found its three inmates huddled together, shivering and horrified.

“What is the matter?—what are you calling for?” she inquired.

“O miss! for the Lord’s sake, let us out! We’ll never smash again—we’ll behave ourselves so well!”

“What is the matter?”

“Oh! there’s the devil in the next cell behind here. I am sure the devil is coming to fetch us all away! There he is again!—O Lord, have mercy upon us!”

And sure enough, there issued from immediately behind the dark cell a series of the most awful screams and yells that had ever escaped human throats. They even alarmed the matron, who was accustomed to these paroxysms of passion; they expressed at once fear, horror, and agony, and were unlike any human

cries that had ever been heard at Millbank Prison. A legion of hyenas could not have given vent to noises more unearthly, and the women, adding their shrieks to the general tumult, implored to be released.

A messenger was sent round to the men's prison to learn the reason for so unusual an occurrence, and presently the mystery was cleared up. Some Chinese prisoners, who had arrived, had been forced to succumb to the general system of hair-cutting, despite their energetic protests to the contrary. The cherished tails had been mercilessly shorn off amidst their screams and shrieks; and it was their cries of lamentation over this calamity that had so alarmed the prisoners in the cell adjoining the room wherein the operation had been performed.

There are exceptions to the general conduct of the prisoners in the "dark." Women will occasionally grow tired of singing, jumping, and blaspheming; and in those cells where a ray or two of light can enter, becoming weary of their stay there, they will beg humbly and earnestly for work, for the leaf of a tract, or for something to relieve the awful monotony of their listless inaction.

One woman, named Honor Matthews, the most desperate and abandoned of a desperate class, once refused to leave the "dark" when her time had expired, flung herself on the floor, and announced her intention to remain there. The "dark" suited her; she should

break out directly she was put into her old cell, or attempt some one's life—threats which she swore to execute as soon as a favourable opportunity for committing either of these acts occurred.

The woman's stay in the "dark" had been a long one, but there was no help for it, save to submit to her continuance there. She was one of the worst characters in the prison—unteachable, intractable, and malicious. The door of the dark cell closed upon her again, and day after day passed—even week after week—without any signs of her altering her determination. The usual prison food was given her each day—I am not quite certain that even extra food was not allowed—and every inducement urged to prevail upon her to return to her customary duties.

The matron in attendance had a favourite little kitten, which was accustomed to follow her about the wards; and it chanced that, in opening the door to attend to this woman, the kitten concealed itself in the cell, and was locked up with the prisoner.

This feline intruder would have been hailed as a welcome guest by most women under the same circumstances; but this prisoner had never shown any affection for a living thing within the prison walls. The kitten was missed, and search made for it. The woman in the dark cell maintained she had seen nothing of it—"What made any one think she knew about the kitten?"

The cell was opened, and the little animal found

suffocated. "That's how I should like to serve the whole of you," growled the heartless wretch.

The woman finished her time at Brixton Prison and went her way. Contrary to general expectation, her name did not appear in the list of "returns."

CHAPTER XIII.

PRISON CHARACTERS: A MOUSE-TAMER

THE character that I shall attempt to sketch in the present chapter I will distinguish by the fictitious name of Seymour. She was one of the short-sentenced women, and has passed from the prison, in all probability, never to return.

Seymour was a lady prisoner. A systematic system of swindling shopkeepers, in which she was aided by her lady-like manners, was discovered after the old fashion, and she made her appearance at Millbank to serve some years of penal servitude.

Her manners at all times verged on the eccentric; and it was the opinion of many of the matrons that her mind was somewhat affected. She was singular in her habits, had a peculiar style of wearing her bonnet and shawl, and held herself strictly aloof from the other prisoners. She exhibited a fair amount of attention to her prison duties, escaped mention in all reports, and was one of those prisoners who gave no trouble, and are

easy to manage—one of the best class of women. She was rather partial to complaining against the other prisoners for insulting her, and was constantly suggesting alterations of prison rules, &c., to any matron who would favour her by listening to her plans.

With her fellow-prisoners she had a pitying way that was to them particularly aggravating, while to prison matrons she was condescending and patronising. Her capabilities of “talking over” were somewhat totally out of the common.

Her Bible knowledge, and her anxiety to argue on scriptural points of doctrine, made a favourable impression on a few of those who were prone to be deceived. She was always open to conviction on any point, she affirmed; she was only anxious to be thoroughly enlightened, and to awake to the knowledge of the truth! The general impression was that Seymour was a hypocrite; that a visionary idea of becoming a “pet prisoner” suggested from the outset her peculiar line of conduct. In words she professed to be truly penitent; but the hardness and even indifference of her manner, in the absence of the chaplain or Scripture reader, inspired doubts as to the reality of her conversion. At Brixton Prison she gave up talking of religion altogether—save at times repeating a chapter or two of the Testament by heart, to show her powers of memory.

At Brixton Prison she continued her objections to her fellow-prisoners—“those poor abandoned creatures,” as

she termed them—declined association when it was in her power; and when favoured with a companion, treated the wondering woman to a lengthened detail of the respectability of her connections. It was at Millbank, however, that her mouse-taming accomplishments showed themselves first. Her affection for mice and sparrows was intense. One mouse, which she invariably termed “my friend,” was accustomed to make his appearance from a hole at her call, and take his place, during the dinner hour, on the table, whereon he would be regaled with crumbs from her six-ounce loaf. Her matron has looked through “the inspection” of her cell more than once, and seen this strange companion at his meals,—timid and alert, nibbling at the crumbs strewn before him, even taking them from the prisoner’s hands, though ready to dart away at the first alarm. Seymour had a peculiar call to the mouse, to which it always responded; and as the intimacy increased, “my friend” gathered greater confidence, and would perch on her shoulder, or run up and down her sleeve.

“My friend” placed itself entirely at her disposal after a little while, and Seymour was accustomed to take it to church in the bosom or sleeve of her dress, and to talk of her friend’s health or appetite, and of the effect the weather had on its constitution.

During the absence of Seymour from the cell one day, a spiteful prisoner imitated her call, brought the inconsiderate mouse on the table, seized it, and—*bit its tail off!*

“My friend” did not respond so readily to the call after this outrage to its dignity, and it was some hours before Seymour discovered the ravages made on her little companion’s personal appearance. Then her indignation and horror knew no bounds.

“Miss ——! some brute has taken off my friend’s tail!” she screamed to the matron. “It’s an infamous and cowardly action, and I hope you’ll report it to the lady superintendent. I demand to know who has been in my cell during my absence. I have a right to know, miss, and I hope you’ll make every inquiry.”

“Miss ——,” was her next salutation, “have you mentioned about my friend yet?”

“Not yet, Seymour.”

“Then I’ll see the deputy superintendent* myself. Put my name down, if you please. My friend has been subjected to the most infamous and revolting treatment!”

And the woman’s rage was so intense that it was anticipated that during the day Seymour would make her first break out. However, breaking out would have lost her “my friend,” and Seymour subsided, made her complaint, and was promised all the redress that prison rules could afford her.

But prison rules had not been framed with any idea as to the injuries which the tails of the mice of the establishment might receive; and this serious omission

* This incident occurred in the old Millbank days, when there was no superintendent to the prison.

having been explained to her, Seymour was pacified. She bore ever afterwards an implacable hatred to the woman who had committed the offence on her "friend," and who made no scruple of avowing the fact; and her demonstrative contempt for this prisoner in particular was often a source of amusement to the women on occasions when they were brought together.

But "my friend" was doomed to a worse fate in the future. When it had recovered all its old confidence in its protector, attended service again in the chapel, and become a regular guest at Seymour's dinner-table, a favourite cat called "Alma," attached to the establishment, made a pounce at it in Seymour's absence, and cut short its career.

Seymour showed great concern at the loss of her companion, broke into a passionate fit of weeping when the news was first communicated, and fell into a despondent and morbid condition, that indicated the weakness of her mind. It was some months before she recovered her customary equanimity; she really fretted about the mouse, and the unhappy termination of its career. In the evening, I have seen her with an unopened book of the prison library on her table, crying silently to herself over the loss of her loved one.

Seymour made many efforts to obtain a successor to "my friend." She broke up half her loaves to encourage the little animals to approach her; but although she succeeded so far as to induce one, or two

to venture on the table after the crumbs, if she remained at a respectful distance from them, yet there was no second mouse to approach within arm's length of one who wished well to the whole *mus* genus.

Seymour passed on to Brixton Prison, and the world of mice knew her no more.

Two instances of sparrow-taming occurred in my prison experience; one by a prisoner of a very different stamp from Seymour, who, by patience, perseverance, and constant study, lured a sparrow into her cell. The bird was christened "Bobby," and would come at her call and feed from her hand in much the same way as the ill-starred *protégé* of Seymour's.

Bobby even evinced no objection to a paper bonnet, and was taught to hop over the table, harnessed by thread to a little paper cart of the prisoner's construction. In bright weather he would be absent for two or three days together; but when the weather was wet, Bobby would fly into the cell and perch on the gas-pipe, whence he would survey, with his head on one side, the woman at her work. But prison pets were doomed to a sad end, and Bobby's fate was worse than "my friend's."

Flying round the cell one night after the gas was lighted, he made a dash at the flame, singed his wings, and died shortly after on the table of the cell, the woman wringing her hands over him.

Such little incidents as these show traits of kindness and feeling amongst the prison women; few and far

between perhaps, but still evidence of a love and concern for something in the midst of much hardness and obduracy of spirit.

In the midst of much that is evil, the good will put forth a feeble shoot or two; and if in strange directions, still they remain as evidence of the fairer side of these murky prison lives. If more time could be spared for each individual case—the nature and habits of the prisoner as carefully studied as a physician might study, in a dangerous case, the antecedents of his suffering patient—I am sure more good would follow the attempt than those versed in the philosophy of crime have ever yet imagined.

CHAPTER XIV.

PRISONERS' FRIENDS

GOVERNMENT does not wholly exclude the prisoners from the outer world—or rather from those faces appertaining to it. After six months at Millbank Prison, the women are allowed to see their friends once in three months—the fathers, mothers, sisters, and brothers more happily off than they, and basking in the free air and sunshine beyond “such places.” Once in three months, at Brixton Prison, a like privilege is conceded.

Caution is exercised on these visiting days, so that no collusion between the outer and the inner world

of criminals may take place; so that no "old pals" and companions in crime may meet and make arrangements for the future—the bright future when the ticket will be granted, and the woman again turned out on society.

A strange medley of character do these prisoners' friends present; and strange attempts to defeat the sagacity of the watchful matron, and to work upon her woman's feelings, so that she may be induced to concede some little favour, are constantly being made. Tragedy, melodrama, comedy, farce, and burlesque play each a part in turn behind the screen of the visiting room; and the matron in attendance requires no small powers of self-command.

At Millbank the prisoner's friend stood behind one wire-work screen, and the prisoner behind another, whilst in a space between the two sat the matron on duty, silent and vigilant.

Let the reader suppose himself in this space, or neutral ground, whilst a few prison visitors file before him in succession. They are fair portraitures of the figures that flit to and fro, and play their part; such dialogues between prisoners and prisoners' friends happen almost every day.

They do not come in quite such rapid succession, perhaps, but our space is limited, and we have much to say on other topics ere FINIS be written to these chronicles.

The prisoner is a woman who has gone wrong in

defiance of friends and husband; whom no efforts have ever set right. She is the wife of a poor industrious workman, who did his best to keep her straight, but could not hinder, in his absence, her constant visits to the gin-shop round the corner. Returning home each night with a hope that Jane would be better—just for once!—his hopes would be dashed by the deserted room, the fireless grate, and no dinner ready; or shadowed by the sleepy-looking, red-eyed woman reeling about the room, and gravely talking incoherent nonsense, in the vain hope of impressing him with a belief in her sobriety.

“If it hadn’t been for the drink, sir,—oh! if it hadn’t been for the drink!” moans many a prisoner, when her heart is touched by the chaplain’s earnest exhortation.

This prisoner, whom drink has brought to ruin, stands and looks wistfully across at a pale-faced man in his Sunday’s best, holding by the hand a little fair-haired child of six or seven years of age. The man is grave and sad, and passes his hand across his eyes, perhaps, as the child cries “mother.” And the child’s voice—as in these cases always—makes the woman lean her head against the wire-screen, and weep—oh! so bitterly! If by some grand process the impulse in these women’s hearts at such times could but be stamped indelibly there, we should hear much more of true repentance!

“Well, Jane?”

"Well, James?"

"Are you pretty well and comfortable, Jane—considerin'?"

"Yes, considerin'," answers the woman, with a weary sigh.

If this is the first meeting since her confinement, and she is such a woman as I attempt to describe here, she is abashed and taciturn at the beginning of the interview. Reminiscences of their last bitter parting flash across her memory; of the quarrel they had, perhaps, ere she ran away and left him, and came to grievous harm. The husband is embarrassed too. He is new to prisons, and the prison matron sitting in the division between him and his wife perplexes him. He could speak out more fully all that is in his heart if the silent witness to all was not sitting there, like a grim Fate by which his wife was haunted. It is hard to be sentimental, to talk of his forgiveness, to preach to her—who had always hated preaching—in a third person's presence.

There ensues an awkward silence, broken at last by the husband. A happy thought occurs to him, to relieve the difficulties of the position. He starts a subject on which they can both discourse freely.

"Don't you think our little Jane has grown?"

"God bless her!—yes. You haven't forgotten me, Jane?" she calls across.

"No, mother."

"I suppose she can get round to kiss her mother,

mum?" inquires the husband, and the woman, giving a little suppressed scream, clasps her hand, and cries—

"Oh! if I only might kiss her!"

The matron murmurs something concerning a breach of rules, and the impossibility of granting her request.

"What's become of Johnny?" asks the mother.

"He's apprenticed now, Jane. He couldn't leave this time. Perhaps the next I may manage to bring him."

"It's an awful place to see his mother in!"

"Ah, it is! And I hope it's a warning, Jane," remarks the husband. "Please God, this is a warning and a lesson that's to last."

("It will never happen again," is the one unceasing refrain of prison penitents, real and sham.)

"Well, I hope not."

The woman looks at him again more wistfully than ever.

"When I get my ticket, James, am I to come home?"

She has made home a curse to this man; she has been a thief, a drunkard—perhaps false to him; but these working-men are always hopeful, large-hearted, and forgiving.

"I hold that man the worst of public foes,
Who, either for his own or children's sake,
To save his blood from scandal, lets the wife,
Whom he knows false, abide and rule the house,"

says Tennyson; but it is a harsh assertion, and, in

some cases, this "worst of public foes" may be the best of Christians and the most forgiving of men. Workingmen, however, do not read Tennyson to any extent, and were probably not thought of when the Laureate wrote those lines. There is a difference, too; the scandal is known, and the neighbours have already talked of James's wife, and pitied his up-hill work to make a good woman of her. The home is desolate, and always out of sorts; the children want looking after in his absence; if she would only repent in the future, what a different life for him and her—if she would only "stash" the drink!

And the man answers her question very hoarsely, but very firmly—

"Yes, Jane, if you'll try to make it home."

"I will, by God!" exclaims the woman, and meeting the matron's reproving glance, she repeats—"I will, James—indeed, I will!" without the supplementary oath.

Then follows all the news of the neighbourhood, to which the woman greedily listens: who has got on in business, and who has gone to the bad; how many have married and died, or had babies, since she was keeping her husband's house in order; how many are anxious about her, and who sends her her love in the days of her tribulation!

Suddenly the weakness common to the best of women peers forth.

"Who's keeping house for you now, James?"

“Robert’s sister keeps the key, and looks in once or twice if I or the children are away. She gets my dinner for me, and so on.”

“I never liked Robert’s sister much, James.”

“She’s a very good woman—honest and industrious.”

“Ah! you allus thought so much of *her*!”

The man seeks to turn the conversation; but the wife will know more of Robert’s sister—how often she is at home, who sits up for him on “club nights,” what becomes of Robert’s sister on Sundays? The man answers frankly enough, and the woman appears satisfied; but there is a gloomy doubt amidst it all, which will not be talked away. Robert’s sister stands between her and the far-off vista through which brighter gleams break in upon the darkness of her prison life.

But the twenty minutes are up; the matron calls attention to the allotted time; the mother begins to cry again, and to wish that she could only kiss the child before she goes. The matron, if impulsive and tender-hearted, will take a ribbon or something from the child, and pass it to the mother, who will remember the kind action in her prayers that night, if she is one of the few who have been induced to pray. Wife, husband, and child then go their separate ways, and the memorable visit is registered in both their hearts.

Visits quite so sentimental between husband and wife are not, however, the general rule. Occasionally a series of mutual recriminations occur in this fashion:—

Husband. Well, you've made a mess of it this time, Sue, by George!

Wife. So it seems.

Husband. All your own fault, you know.

Wife. Don't stand there telling lies, Joe. If it hadn't been for your blackguard goings on, I should have never come to this.

Husband. You did it all yourself—you know you did. What do you want to try to make this lady (*with a jerk of his thumb to the matron on duty*) believe all your cussed stories for?

And thus they will continue their accusations of each other, until, their voices rising as their passions become excited, the matron considers it her duty to remind them that, unless there is a change of tone, the interview must be summarily cut short.

But we have not done with prisoners' friends yet. A turn of the slide, and a penal class woman takes her place on one side, and her brother or sister, or both, on the other. In this case, for the sake of an illustration, we will say brother and sister together.

There is no mistaking the relationship any more than the profession, past and present, of this trio. The overhanging brows, deep-set eyes, and thick sensual lips, are of one family cast, and the furtive glances right and left, and around, are true thieves' glances. There is a general likeness amongst professional thieves, which a little observation does not fail to detect. Knavery stamps all its votaries with a common seal, and though

the impression is faint in many instances—in many more it is very strongly marked—yet the brand is always there, and there are no good thoughts to wear it away.

Greetings are exchanged. The prisoner hopes Jack and Mary are well, and Mary hopes the same of her unfortunate sister Ann. Glances are cast at the matron, and some movement of the features expresses their conviction that she is an easy one, or the reverse. The cue is taken accordingly, and the officer is prepared to be more than usually watchful and attentive.

Great regret is expressed at the prisoner's position, and many moral reflections are indulged in by the brother and sister, all for the edification of the matron in charge.

"I hope you'll never come to this again, Ann," says the brother; "you were brought up right and piously, and should have knowed better—you were larnt your catechiz, and all the 'mandments, and we did our best to keep you straight."

"I know that, Jack."

"It's along o' bad company, Ann," adds Mary, with a wink; "all along of Joe Barclay and his games. Joe's got in trouble, Ann."

"Oh, has he?"

"Seven years on it, poor fellow! Tooked up all in a flash like."

"Poor Joe!"

"How are *you* getting on, Ann?" asks Jack.

"Oh, pretty well," with a reckless toss of her head.

"That's all right."

"Where's mother?" inquires the prisoner.

"She's—she's *gone in the country*."

"And father?"

"We expect him back *from the country* next month—on the fifth, Ann."

"Ah, I was a-trying to count up," remarks Ann; "I thought it was about the fifth."

Jack proceeds to communicate all the news, in a style a little enigmatical, dropping now and then three or four words of true thieves' dialect, or Romany, as it is sometimes designated by the women, although there is a marked difference between thieves' Romany and the dialect peculiar to the gipsy race. When indications of a dialogue in this *patois* begin to appear, the matron warns the prisoner's friends that it is a breach of rules, and will be followed by the prisoner's withdrawal. The friends "are very sorry, mum, and very humble, and it didn't strike 'em before, mum, and it was on'y a habit of theirs, and it shan't occur again, mum."

In less than two or three minutes it does occur again, and there is such an evident intention to deceive, that it becomes necessary to abridge the interview, and separate these black sheep. Jack and Mary go away muttering discontent, and Ann takes to smashing when she reaches her cell, because she has been put upon and treated shabbily.

“It’s all that Miss ——. I’ll have her *blessed*”—she doesn’t always call it blessed—“life one of these fine days. On’y wait till I get a chance, that’s all.”

A turn of the slide, and the picture of another party is presented. I will give their interview almost verbatim, as it affords some little insight into the thoughts of a certain class of prisoners from which I have to draw a character presently.

The prisoner is a young, pale-faced girl; the prison visitor, her mother, a poor, old, tottering, decently clad woman. The latter cries very bitterly at the first sight of her daughter, and makes frequent use of a very clean pocket handkerchief. The prisoner bites her lips, which will quiver in spite of her, and bursts out at last with—

“Dontee cry, mother!—I be very comfortable—there’s such a little to cry about!”

“Oh! dear—it’s very sad!”

“Did you come up to-day?”

“Yes; by the early train. I suppose I can’t shake hands with my girl, anyhow, miss?”

“It is against the rules here.”

“Very well, miss,” she says, with a sigh.

It is the daughter in this instance that asks all the questions, and tries to distract her mother from the dark thoughts that such an interview is calculated to suggest.

“How are you getting on, mother?—How’s Uncle John, and all his little ones?—Has Jemmy come back

from sea?—Have you heard from Jemmy?—Is Sarah Ann married yet?”

The old lady gathers more nerve as the interview proceeds, dries her eyes, answers all her daughter's questions, and becoming at last very garrulous, details all the gossip of the far-away village whence she has journeyed to see her imprisoned child.

“Uncle John helped me with a couple of shillings, my dear, or I should never have been able to come and see you,” she tells her daughter. “Uncle John's always very kind, though he has a large family of his own to help, Martha.”

“How did you get through the winter, now?” asks the daughter anxiously.

“Poorly! poorly! My eyes went bad again—and there was no work about—and so I had parish relief, my dear.”

“Ah! that's bad!”

“I shall have to go into 'the House' altogether soon.”

“No, don't do that!” is the quick reply.

“There's no help for it, Martha. It isn't,” she adds in a sorrowful, almost a reproachful manner, “as if I had my daughter to help me in my weakness and old age.”

“Don't go into the House,” repeats the prisoner.

“What can I do, my dear?”

“*Come here!*”

The old woman flings up her hands in horror, and the daughter continues in an earnest whisper—

“You'll be treated well here. You'll have enough

to eat and drink—you won't have any hard words here—they give you such blankets and sheets to lie on!—you can have the doctor every day if you like—and it's like heaven to be in the infirmary! O mother! if you would only try and come here!”

The mother stands behind the wire-work and seems to consider the matter; the daughter becomes more eloquent and persuasive—even begins to suggest the best plan to set about it—until the matron calls her to order, and reproves her for her wickedness.

“It's not wickedness!” says the prisoner; “it's the best thing, God knows, that can happen to us poor!”

And the prisoner is not far wrong. Amidst the mass of fallen sisters that the prisons contain, there are these strange practical philosophers—women who have weighed all the chances between the workhouse and the prison, and who, being compelled to choose between one and the other, strike the balance in favour of the gaol. A little less liberty, but more kindness and attention; better food and more friendly faces—only the key turned on them and their sleeping-chamber called “a cell!”—books to read, good warm clothing, and the chaplain to talk to them every day.

I have been often tempted to wonder whether the workhouses would be always full, whether women would still have to hesitate between the Parish and the Prison, whether the time would come when Government would make no more of these disgraceful contracts with the slop-houses and the wholesale firms,

and no longer compete so closely, so cruelly, with the honest and hard-working poor. If some better and more just system be not presently adopted, there will be living illustrations to Hood's "Song of the Shirt" to the end of time. I cannot think it fair or humane to accept contracts from clothing firms at prices with which no woman who has rent to pay and a home to keep can possibly compete. Prisoners, especially female prisoners, should do prison work, army work, the binding of the prison books—even the printing of the innumerable forms might possibly be taught them; but any other work than that of Government should not, for the sake of those who desire to live honestly and resist temptation, be allowed to find its way into our male or female prisons.

I am conscious that I am not the first to raise my voice against this system; but the matter has been long since dropped, and the system is at work still. It is a system morally and radically wrong, and must fall some day; and even though the change should entail some additional expense upon the nation, I am confident that the heart of the people of this country is large and sound enough not to shrink from that ordeal, for the sake of the hard-working poor, struggling, in the midst of difficulty and temptation, to maintain their honesty and uprightness. In one year, *for one firm alone*, by one female prison, forty-three thousand seven hundred and twenty-eight shirts were made, and the work, thus diverted from its

proper channel, is still done on as large a scale, I believe.*

Now, there are many women like the prisoner, whose interview with her mother I have described—and like one whom I shall have to mention in a future chapter—who, knowing, and deliberately weighing all this, give up their work in despair, fearing that they can never contend with success against such opposition.

The woman I have mentioned left her daughter with a very different idea of prison life from that which she entertained when she first met her; with a conviction that it was to be preferred to life in the workhouse, and with regret that one must forfeit a good name to become a female convict. If the doors of the prison could have been opened for admission only by the expression of a wish to that effect, we should ere long have had the mother as well as the daughter.

One half of the prison visitors are, however, as bad as the prisoners—pupils of the same school, greater adepts in crime, who, for the present, have escaped confinement. The cool impudence of this class is worthy of note. Many of them are deep knaves; but there is often a simplicity in their cunning that defeats itself. A prison visitor of this doubtful class will

* 50,822 shirts were made for one City firm, and 96,541 bags mended for another, by Millbank women in one year. By the Brixton female convicts, during the same year, 30,423 shirts, 1809 duck slops, and upwards of a thousand other articles, were made for different firms.

calmly pass through the grating a piece of paper to the matron, saying—

“Will you have the kindness to hand that to my sister”—(or mother, or whatever the relationship may be)—“it's only an address, miss.”

The bland astonishment feigned by the visitor on being informed that it is against the rules to pass a paper to the prisoner is a very poor attempt at innocence.

Delicate hints are occasionally made to the matron that money, in return for the concession of any little favour, will be forthcoming, if required. The more disreputable class of these visitors appear to consider this offer as a temptation which even a prison matron has not the power to withstand. In some rare cases the offer is made in ignorance of the rules, and in all good feeling—a fact which is easily discovered. On a prisoner saying once to a sailor who had been admitted as a visitor—

“I've nothing to complain of—the prison matron is very kind to me,” he immediately drew forth two sovereigns, which he insisted on the matron's accepting, until the fact was made perfectly clear to him that it was more than her place was worth to receive the donation.

One young woman who had brought her captive mother a screw of snuff in a paper, could not understand the matron's reasons for not passing it over. And the mother, who had a *penchant* for the luxury,

fearing that it was not to be given up to her, hoped Miss —— would just “stretch a point” for this once. “It was only snuff, and it could not do a mite of harm to anybody—and she did so miss it—and, strike her dead, Miss ——, if she’d ever split about it!”

The opportunity for “splitting,” it may readily be imagined, was not put in her power.

Prison visiting has also sad and trying phases. When the prisoner is one of the higher classes, and the commission of her crime has been one of those mysteries for which it is difficult to account, the pain of meeting her friends is almost unendurable. The friends, whose carriage may be waiting without, regard the prisoner with wonder, pity, and feelings of shame they cannot conceal; and the tears and sobs which they are unable to restrain affect the watcher more than is generally imagined. It is very difficult to become accustomed to this portion of a principal matron’s duty—the office is not enviable.

CHAPTER XV.

PRISON CHARACTERS: “GRANNY COLLIS”

As an illustration of much that has been alluded to in a preceding chapter, I may as well devote a page or two in this place to the outlines of a character which, though it may be regarded as exceptional, is still sometimes to be found in our female prisons.

Collis was an old woman of seventy years of age and upwards—almost the mother of the prison. Looking philosophically at the advantages of prison life, she grew as attached to her place of confinement as old debtors are said to have been to the Queen's Bench and the Fleet.

She was not a great favourite with the other prisoners, for she was too quiet, orderly, and in her way religious. Still, she was one who made no enemies, got into no quarrels or disputes, and was content to be let alone. More of a favourite with the prison officers, she was meek, civil, and obedient to the assistant matron on probation as well as to the lady superintendent.

A little, spare, pretty old woman, with a chirping voice, good-tempered, even merry at times, she took the ills that prison flesh is heir to with composure, was content with everything, and could always be trusted as truthful. She read her Bible with great attention in her cell, and made no parade of doing so. The only thing about her that looked like affectation was her expression of regret at the theft that had brought her to such a pass—for she was fond of prison life, and had outlived all friends in the world beyond it.

"I don't know what I shall do when my time's up," she said to me once; "there's no one to take care of me outside, and I'm afraid they'll treat me very badly at the workhouse. Well, I suppose, miss, I must make the best of it."

She was a woman who always did make the best of

it, and her good-tempered, pleasant face was scarcely like that of a prisoner. At her age, and with her natural weakness, it would have been easy, with a little acting, to have been passed over to the infirmary ward, where "everything that heart could wish for," as the phrase runs, would have been at her disposal. But she was satisfied with her cell, and her footing of equality with the other prisoners—both at Millbank and Brixton—and in fact was very proud of being able to do her stroke of work—such as it was—with the rest. Matrons fell into the way of treating her kindly, and always gave her, when it was possible, the lion's share of ease. There is respect for old age, even in a prison.

All the prisoners were "children" with her—"Oh, that unruly child next door, how she did keep me awake last night, to be sure!"—or, "That poor child, Smith, has gone off to the 'dark' again—dear, dear, dear, now, I'm really very sorry!"

Her cell was a pattern of cleanliness and order—"her little room," she was fond of designating it. A curious sight in the long winter evenings it was, to see this motherly old woman sitting with her open Bible—her thin, bony hands pushing back her grey hair, as she leaned her elbows on the table, and studied the promises of that Book on which she built her hopes.

I have often wondered what peculiar train of thought Granny Collis was accustomed to indulge in over her Bible—how she reconciled her past life, and even her future intentions, with the counsel and warning of

God's Word. I believe she had some peculiar train of reasoning by which she reconciled matters, and that she fancied, even if she returned to prison to work out a fresh sentence, that God would forgive the new crime which might place her there, considering how helpless and friendless she was in the outer world.

Collis was attentive to the chaplain's discourse in chapel, a regular communicant, and a patient listener to the counsel proffered in her cell; but really penitent as she was for past misconduct, she clung to the idea of coming back again, although it was the matrons rather than the higher officers of the prison who guessed her real intentions.

"I'll try the workhouse," was her remark one day; "but I'm thinking it won't suit me like this. Not half so comfortable and *quiet*."

Collis worked her sentence out, and went her way. The prisoners wished Granny good luck, the matrons bade her God speed, and the prison gates closed behind her, as it was thought, for the last time. She had worked out her full sentence—she had been committed before the act of 1857, that allowed remissions from long sentences of penal servitude*—and it was not anticipated by the majority that that cheerful, feeble old woman would ever be tottering down the wards again.

But in a few months Collis reappeared at Millbank Prison. Old Mary had been again convicted of

* Before 1857 tickets-of-leave were granted to transports, but sentences of penal servitude were worked out in full.

a petty theft, and was sentenced to a second term of imprisonment.

"I have come back to settle down for good," she said; "I know I have done very wrong, and that I am old enough to know what's right by this time, but *I couldn't keep away!* I have tried the workhouse, and they're so terrible noisy there, and there's not half the order there should be, and everybody wants to quarrel so. Besides," she added, with characteristic *naïveté*, "they don't understand my ways at the workhouse, and you are all so used to me by this time!"

Passing from Millbank to Brixton, she made the same excuse to the authorities there, and the same confession, that "she knew how wrong it was," and then "settled down" to work her time out, or to die in working it. She fell into the same old habits—read her Bible as industriously as ever, took the Sacrament, preserved ever the same good temper, and *did* die before the term of her imprisonment was ended.

She broke up slowly, and was removed at last to the infirmary, where she was always patient, cheerful, and resigned. A good prisoner, and as good a Christian as it was possible for a prisoner to be, she died, I think, at the age of seventy-six, in the infirmary ward of Brixton Prison.

She had wished to die in gaol, and had sinned to die there. A strange, hard, friendless life hers must have been, to have looked forward to such a haven of rest as the close of her pilgrimage!

CHAPTER XVI.

PRISON CHILDREN

THE subject which forms the heading of this chapter has been lightly dwelt upon by former writers on prison matters. As I have a little more to say concerning it, I may venture to follow on the beaten track. In most cases, for the reader's sake, I have touched but lightly on incidents to which other writers have alluded; only where it was necessary to correct some error, or to supply some forgotten details, have I considered it my duty to follow in the steps of those who have preceded me.

Setting aside for the nonce the fact that an article on the Prison Nursery has been written by the late Henry Mayhew, I turn my attention to this subject—this little change of prison scene and character, which passes before the view of those in office at Brixton.

The prison nursery, it may be premised, was peculiar to Brixton.* Women who had not served their probation at Millbank were sent on to the Surrey prison when their time drew near. The percentage of the number of women who arrived *enceinte* at Millbank was not a large one; still at Brixton timely provision was made

* Previous to the institution of the nursery at Brixton Prison there was a series of cells allotted to prisoners and their children at Millbank, and termed the "Nursery Ward."

for such emergencies, and a nursery for the little unfortunates provided.

Strictly speaking, what was called the nursery was more of a convalescent room, though it generally passed by the former appellation.

The subject of my last sketch spent some time here in her old age, previous to being passed on to the infirmary; and women whose mental or physical infirmities rendered them unfit subjects for stone cells, but who were not ill enough to become inmates of the infirmary, were accommodated at this resting-place.

The prison nursery was in the centre of a prison ward, and was a large room with sleeping accommodation for twenty women and their charges. Iron screens were padlocked before the fires, to prevent any accident from the carelessness of the women or the rashness of the children. The mothers were supposed to rise at the same time as the women in other parts of the prison; but some latitude was allowed in this respect, and it was not till a considerably later hour that each prisoner had cleaned her allotted portion of the room, and the children had begun to play about.

That prison nursery formed a strange picture. "There is no place," wrote Henry Mayhew, "in which there is so much toleration and true wisdom, if not goodness, to be learnt as in the convict nursery at Brixton." I may add that there was no place that suggested more sad thoughts, or that afforded at times a more awful insight into the workings of some mother's

hearts. In the aggregate these female prisoners were gentle, loving mothers enough ; but they were mothers who, having known no better life themselves, and being insensible to the shame of their position, cared not to develop in these little prison flowers any grace or virtue.

There have been a few variations in the prison rules respecting these children. They were formerly sent to their friends, or to the parish, at the expiration of two years ; of late they have generally remained till the completion of the mother's sentence. In the case of long-sentenced women I am doubtful, but I remember no instance of a child remaining longer than four years in prison. One child, named Annie, who was not born at the prison, but, for some particular reason, arrived there afterwards, remained, however, with her mother till she reached the age of six years. On glancing at the article on the Prison Nursery, in Mr. Mayhew's work, "The Great World of London," I perceive he mentions a child of four years old, who was so surprised at the aspect of external things, that in the first days of its freedom—or rather of its mother's freedom—it called a horse "a great cat." Mr. Mayhew, I am inclined to think, had been misled. The prison children had many opportunities of seeing horses in the prison yard.

The airing ground, wherein they were accustomed to play, had a pair of gates opening on the court, or outer yard, at which a row of children were sure to

appear, if they were left open for prison purposes a moment. Into the outer yard horses and carts were constantly entering; the contractor's or the miller's cart, the Director's cab, the omnibuses with women from Millbank to Brixton, and conveyances to take back the misbehaved to Millbank,* &c. The children were not kept quite so much in the dark with reference to all sublunary things, and they were fond of playing at horses in the prison nursery, with more noise and pattering of their tiny feet than was altogether comfortable at times. They even passed out of prison occasionally, and went by invitation to tea, to the houses of some of the principal officers down the prison lane, and now and then to Sunday school in the chaplain's quarters.

The children were generally happy little things. Their playthings principally consisted of a few rag dolls made by the mothers, and some boxes of toys purchased by the matrons, who had their little favourites. They were, taken altogether, a delicate class of children—the prison air was not the best atmosphere for infants—yet many of them were quick, sharp in intellect, with a sagacity beyond their years. Not a few of them were the offspring of sharp mothers, whose example and teaching were pernicious. It is one of the saddest facts the matron has to record, that more than once she has heard a child of two years old giving utterance to an

* The prison rule was, however, to keep the gates strictly closed during the arrival or departure of prisoners,

oath that it has learned from—perhaps been taught by—its mother, and the exclamation has been received by a shout of laughter from the women in the room.

One little child, when teased too much by its mother or by other mothers, was in the habit of threatening to go to the “dark.”

There is one case of a mother with little love for her offspring—who was more jealous of her “pal,” and her pal’s attention to other prisoners, than of the diversion of her own child’s affection from its natural object. Women might take the infant, and matrons might make a favourite of it; but talk too much to her old pal, and, forgetting the nursery and the child, she would take to smashing, and be carried off to a refractory cell in consequence.

Another mother—in the days of the nursery ward at Millbank—evinced her gratitude for a matron’s attention to her child, by tearing a handful of hair from the officer’s head. The latter was stooping to kiss the child in the cell, and the temptation to a malicious woman being too great to be resisted, the savage attack was made. Most of the children who had attained the age of three years had some knowledge of their letters, but there was no regular plan of instruction, and no schoolmistress appointed to the nursery.

It was a dull, unnatural life for these little ones; but with many of them, probably it was the brightest and purest era in their lives,

CHAPTER XVII.

PRISON CHARACTERS: MARY ANN BALL

THE reader has already obtained some insight into the character of this prisoner from anecdotes previously related. In my chapter on Prisoners' Vanity, I have made special mention of Ball, whose ingenuity in altering her dress and bonnet, &c., was a subject of envy or admiration amongst the prisoners, according to their respective natures.

Mary Ann Ball was a transfer from Stafford Gaol, from which she arrived with a few special cautions from its authorities. Particular mention was made of her cunning and her extraordinary strength. It was mentioned, by way of a delicate hint to be cautious, that at Stafford she had torn up with her hands an iron plate firmly secured in the floor.

Ball was a very handsome girl, nineteen or twenty years of age, dark-eyed, and of the middle height. Perfectly conscious of her good looks, she was about the vainest woman who had ever entered a prison. Everything was at once altered to suit her figure, or agree with her complexion; and the attempt to train her to act in obedience to the prison rules was an arduous and unprofitable task. She was not to be tamed; she might be killed by harsh discipline, but there was no rendering her a well-behaved woman. Her own way she must and would have.

She was not one of those morose, malicious women, to whom I shall have to refer a little further on. In her best moods, she was light-hearted and generous. There was one drawback, however — that her best moods were few and far between, and that a straw would ruffle them. The appropriation by another of her piece of flannel, of her particular seat in chapel, or of her place in the laundry; a contemptuous remark from another prisoner, a sharp word from one of the matrons, even a difference of opinion about the complaints with which she used to trouble the doctor, would transform her at once into a raging fury.

Ball was often in trouble for breaking windows and destroying the furniture of her cell; and her progress to the "dark" could be traced by shreds and patches of her garments, by tufts of hair from the men's heads and whiskers, and by the buttons of their official uniform. In the dark cells she would keep herself lively for some time by the exercise of her vocal powers; and the handcuffs with which her wrists had been ornamented were generally flung at the head of the first person who opened the outer door and looked through the grating at her.

There was a very good rule to the effect that the matron on night duty should visit the "dark cell" on each of her rounds, and make certain that the woman in it was well, or had not attempted violence on herself. The inmates of the "dark" were desperate characters, and there was no reckoning upon their

actions from one hour to another. The matron passed once every hour; if the woman was singing, the officer went by, or perhaps attempted a gentle remonstrance; if she was quiet, and would not respond to her name, it was necessary to slide back the pad, open the first door, and look through the iron grating which formed the second.

Ball was very partial to giving this extra trouble to the night officer. Though she had been singing ten minutes previously, she would maintain a rigid silence when the matron noiselessly approached,* and tapped with her knuckles at the first door.

"Good night, Ball," or, "Are you quite well, Ball?" was the general remark on such occasions.

No reply.

Very probably the matron would attempt to coax her.

"You are not going to make me unfasten the door again, Ball?—do answer, there's a good girl!"

No response issuing from the dark cell, the door would be opened, and the light in the matron's hand held aloft for better inspection. Then Ball would perhaps be found standing against the iron door, looking very haggard, and would probably receive the officer with a half-maniacal laugh; or lying full length on the floor, with the remnants of her blankets strewn

* The night officer was generally accustomed to wear a species of indiarubber shoes or goloshes. These were termed "sneaks" by the women.

round her, she would refuse to answer any question put to her.

The following dialogue once occurred between Ball and a matron on night duty. The latter had opened the outer door two or three times, and Ball had regularly been found close to the iron grating. The fourth time the matron, who was somewhat of a favourite with this troublesome prisoner in her best moods, complained of fatigue. Still Ball stood and stared behind the bars, and made no reply.

“You will not give me all this trouble again, Ball?”

“Sure,” was the sharp, sudden answer to this question.

“It isn’t my fault you are here. I am really sorry to find you have broken out again.”

“You sorry!—that’s the way you all try to cant over me.”

“I really am sorry, Ball.”

Ball gave an impatient snort.

“And I am tired. I have been nursing a little sick brother to-day, and have not had my usual rest. Try to sleep, and say good-night when I knock next time, will you?”

“Shan’t.”

The next round the matron knocked as usual on the outer door.

“Good night, Ball,” she cried.

“Good night, miss. *God bless you!*”

Such little signs of an impressionable nature this

handsome tigress made at rare intervals, but it would have required the whole staff of matrons to study every whim of hers; and so she would break out again, go to the "dark," come back, quarrel, and so on, *ad infinitum*.

Ball was not only skilful in removing her handcuffs, but it was with considerable difficulty that any of the canvas strait waistcoats, or "jackets," as they are called, could be kept on her for any length of time. She had an ingenious method of rubbing her jacket against the wall of the cell until the straps were worn through; and having thus freed her hands from durance vile, she would make amends for past inaction by wreaking her vengeance on all the objects around her that lay in her power.

At Brixton Prison she gave no sign of amendment; every article of prison costume she altered to her own fancy, and a remonstrance on the subject elicited the customary outburst. She wound up one of her sojourns at that prison by a feat that would have added to the notoriety of Jack Sheppard. Being confined for misbehaviour in one of the refractory cells, she contrived to free herself from her jacket, tear down the bricks and mortar of the wall, and work her way into the chimney of a matron's room adjoining—in which she remained a fixture, until relieved from her extraordinary position. For this feat she was returned to Millbank, where she continued to behave much after her usual manner, conducting herself with just sufficient

moderation of language and behaviour to make her passable for Brixton once more. The superintendents, matrons, &c., of both prisons were always extremely rejoiced to get rid of her. If Millbank could only flatter itself into the belief that Ball's conduct was improving, away went the girl to the Surrey prison; if Brixton could make a fair case against her for breach of discipline, back she came to Middlesex.

"Here's Ball back," spread with lightning-like rapidity from mess-room to mess-room; and the news was welcome neither to prison officers nor prisoners. Only one woman—a prisoner of a later date, concerning whom we shall have a little to say presently—was ever equally incorrigible.

Ball was partial to company, and would at times feign insanity, and make sham attempts to injure herself, in order to have an associate. She was well acquainted with the rule that no prisoner giving signs of a failing intellect is allowed to be alone in her cell; and, when tired of her own society, she would indulge in fits of ungovernable violence and incoherent raving, that puzzled every one that endeavoured to account for them.

I have seen three male officers and two matrons trying to secure her in bed, and such was the immense power of this woman, that even when fighting against such odds, it was with difficulty she was mastered.

The only attempt at escape—or perhaps merely to elude the vigilance of the officer in charge and create

an excitement—was made by Ball and another prisoner. The washing for the prisons was chiefly performed, at Brixton, in a large laundry erected for the purpose. A certain number of the prisoners was told off each day for washing duties, and marched from the cells to the laundry. Here the washing was proceeded with under the surveillance of a matron, whose berth was not the most eligible “under Government.” The muscular strength of Ball, which in other circumstances was so formidable, was applied to a useful purpose when she took her place at the washing-tub.

In the winter time, over their washing-tubs, Ball and another prisoner of the name of Gardner concerted a plan for eluding the matron’s vigilance. Night had almost set in before the women were conducted to their cells, to reach which it was necessary to cross one of the airing grounds. On their way Ball and Gardner suddenly dropped behind some bushes, and crouched in their shadow until the last woman and matron in attendance had passed by. It may be readily imagined that the consternation amongst the prison officers was excessive when it was discovered that two women had disappeared from the ranks. As the prisoners passed into the wards towards their cells they were counted in the usual way, and the startling fact became apparent that Ball and Gardner were missing.

An alarm of fire could only have produced equal excitement amongst all the Brixton staff; the matrons

trembled for their situations; the credit of every one's vigilance was at stake. The alarm was given, and search was made for the missing culprits; messengers were despatched to the outer walls, to make quite certain that the fugitives were not already dropping from them.

The officers having retraced their steps across the yard to the laundry, Ball and Gardner were found quietly ensconced in a dark corner of it. Considerable satisfaction was expressed by these young ladies at the trouble they had given, and the excitement into which they had thrown the whole prison. For this escapade both were confined in refractory cells, with bread and water.

Time, that waits for no woman, brought nearer every day the certainty of liberty for Ball, who did make some little effort to behave better as the period approached. She was also humoured in no small degree. Harsh measures had been a failure with her; her strength had been tested to the utmost, and she was no longer the powerful, healthy girl, who had entered the prison years ago. Still her spirit was not broken; she was as quick to take offence and evince her usual "tempers" as ever; it was only by long study of her peculiar disposition that the matrons had learned how successfully to humour her caprice, and which was the best way to counteract any threatened storm.

When a ward was being exercised, she was allowed at times to water a little patch of garden ground in

the airing yard or to go out on cleaning duties. Any plan, indeed, which offered a chance of making her more agreeable or submissive was readily adopted.

As the days between her prison cell and liberty grew fewer and fewer—could be counted on her fingers—she betrayed an unusual amount of restlessness and excitement.

“If I could only have one more break out before I go,” she frankly avowed once. “I can hardly stand this; I am sure I shall make a smash of it before the ticket comes.”

Ball, I should have remarked, had long since forfeited, by her misconduct, her claim to a ticket-of-leave; and it was only by the kindness of a Director that she had been given an extra chance—an eight months' further trial. Had she been reported during those probationary months, she would have had to work out her full sentence. This was the secret of her hard struggle with her own desperate character. Sometimes she felt the impulse to break out so overpowering that she would implore her matron to lock her up in the “dark” for a couple of hours or so.

“Lock me up!—it's a-coming, if you don't!—just an hour or two, to get me cool like!”

And she was quietly locked up for the period required, and came out all the better for the change; and so by her own efforts, and the matron's leniency, she fought her way through her time, and received at last her license to retire.

It was a happy day for the officers when Ball took her departure, although it was not anticipated that more than a fortnight would elapse before her presence would again cast a shadow over Brixton Prison.* She had said something of an intention to proceed to America, to try her fortune in the New World; but as she was constantly changing her mind, little satisfaction was derived from her assertion.

However, to the amazement of the officers, and, I trust, for the lasting benefit of English society, she took her departure to America, the prisons of which country, let us hope, are not known to her.†

CHAPTER XVIII.

GOOD-CONDUCT WOMEN AND THEIR PRIVILEGES

WE have spoken so much of bad-conduct women and their vagaries—and there remains so much yet untold concerning them—that it may be as much a relief to the reader as to the writer to pause awhile, and glance at the better side of prison character.

* Female prisoners taken up on ticket-of-leave used to return at once to Brixton Prison to finish their sentence.

† Since the publication of this work I have been favoured with a communication from W. Bayne Ranken, Esq., Hon. Sec. to the Prisoners' Aid Society. He has very kindly supplied me with a few further details respecting that prison character which forms the subject of the present chapter. Mary Ann Ball was assisted to emigrate by the Prisoners' Aid Society, and sailed for America, *en route* to Canada, on the 23rd of December 1858.

I could have wished it had been in my power to select brighter scenes to exemplify the good that is inherent in the human heart, and to exhibit the fruit that genuine repentance often bears. Possibly the book would have been more devoid of interest and incident; yet the writer's task would have been a more gratifying one, and philanthropists would have found more subjects for congratulation than it will be in my power to offer them.

But I have set myself this task, and have resolved to fulfil it in a plain and truthful manner. Round the doors of these dark places I cannot wreath many garlands to hide the deformity within—it is beyond the prison that a great writer pictures vice behind its mask of flowers. Here vice exists in all its naked and abhorred deformity; exultant in the ruin it has caused, or the life it has taken, grieving only for the barriers by which its freedom is restrained, and by which it is checked in its downward course.

I spoke just now of the better side of prison character. Perhaps, after all, it is only the side better disciplined, on which most of these good-conduct women range themselves.

Women who have command over their passions, and have the common sense to see that a strict obedience to the prison rules tends to their own advantage, procure them little privileges, and increase the scale of their gratuities, form the majority of the good-conduct class. Many of them are hypocritical and canting in

the extreme—make whining protestations of repentance to the chaplain, and when his back is turned upon them, indulge in a grimace at his remarks. A few, a very few, are quiet and orderly, make no profession, or if they make one, seem really imbued with a sense of the error of their ways. Women of this character are seldom enrolled in the good books of their fellow-prisoners. It is difficult to draw the line where hypocrisy ends and true religious feeling begins. It is a riddle even to the chaplain, who has been arduously labouring at the up-hill task of these women's reformation.

The advantages attached to good conduct were seen best at Brixton. The first acknowledgment of their better conduct was their transference from Millbank to Brixton. The rewards were progressive, and we will follow the steps of an industrious woman from the third class to the top of the tree, when the much-coveted print-dress of special service, an omen that her days of prison life were drawing to a close, was conferred.

A third-class woman wore a brown dress, and belonged to the "old prison;" she had the usual prison diet, and a gratuity of fourpence a week in return for her labour. After a few months' faithful service, during which no report had been made against her for incivility and insubordination, she passed to the East Wing, where she wore the same brown dress, with the addition of a badge of black cloth, having No. 2

stitched upon it in white, became so and so of the East Division, and was allowed the woman's luxury of tea three times in the week. The weekly salary for services was raised to sixpence, and her account was as carefully kept at the office as the Duke of Westminster's at his banker's.

Two months of this service took her to the West Division, and made her a green-dress woman, one of the first class, with tea every day, a gratuity of eightpence a week, and a No. 1 badge. More "talking time" was also allowed to the No. 1 women—a favour that was highly appreciated, as some of my fair readers may readily imagine. From the No. 1 women were chosen "the labour women," that is, those who could be serviceable in the laundry, kitchen, infirmary, &c., and those less robust, who were useful as good needlewomen. A labour-woman, and a needlewoman who could make five or six shirts a week, were allowed one shilling a week gratuity; and a woman who never lost her badge found, when her time had expired, a nice little amount to start her in the world again, payable in three instalments, if the sum amounted to six pounds or upwards.

The first instalment was generally one pound nineteen shillings and sixpence—never more. A discharged prisoner resident in the country took home with her the necessary forms of application for the remaining instalments, which forms, at the expiration of the allotted time (two months, I think), had to be filled in

by the woman herself, and witnessed by a clergyman or magistrate, who had also to testify to her mode of living. Under these circumstances, I think there must be in Government hands a surplus fund which is never likely to be drawn upon.

Concerning these accounts there was no end of squabbling between the women and the officers of the wards. The financial condition of each woman was made out on cards, and given in once a quarter; and the common rule was for a prisoner to consider her account extremely low and one-sided, and to suggest that the weeks in which five or six shirts had been made (shilling weeks) had been considerably underestimated.

Prisoners climbed to No. 1, and fell to Nos. 2 or 3 (seldom No. 3, unless any stealing or fighting occurred), and then worked up again. A woman rarely retained a No. 1 badge for the whole period of her sentence, unless it was an old woman of reticent habits. A No. 1 woman, if under forty years of age, was eligible for Fulham Refuge within twelve or fourteen months of the expiration of her prison servitude. Those past that age, or who had lost their badge several times for incivility, and whose future conduct still remained a matter of some speculation, remained at Brixton, and served their time out.

Losing a badge involved no loss of gratuity—save the difference of remuneration between a second and first class woman—unless a break-out occurred, or

damage was done to prison property, when the expenses were carefully deducted from the little amount in hand.

A woman who had behaved remarkably well all her time—who had not had a single break-out, or destroyed the property of the prison—was rewarded, towards the end of her imprisonment, with the “special service dress”—a cotton print gown and apron, that rendered her a distinguished mark amongst the browns and greens of less deserving prisoners.

The prisoners were naturally proud of this dress. Twelve was the maximum number of special service dresses allowed at Brixton. A special service woman had great advantages. She was eligible to act as messenger, was sent unguarded from one wing to another, or to any part of the prison, ending with the great front gates, where sat sturdy, honest Mr. Lockett—then the amiable Cerberus of that sombre institution.

Beyond this, Government had no further favours to confer at Brixton.

CHAPTER XIX.

PRISON CHARACTERS: A FIGHT FOR A SOUL

IN the story which follows, though every incident is strictly true, I shall not make any parade of names, but, to the best of my ability, and for reasons that will be presently obvious, disguise those of the principal

actors in the events recorded. Not, as in another story which I have to tell, that there is anything which militates against the character of any prisoner or prison officer—on the contrary, there is a great deal that redounds to the credit of every one connected with it—but that the individuals may be still living and breathing in our midst, and any public mention of their names would tend to draw an amount of attention towards them to which probably they would very naturally object.

My story shows the brighter side of prison life; and in the midst of the darkness that belongs to such an existence, it is pleasant to find a flower springing up in uncongenial soil, and struggling hard, amidst the hostile winds that threaten to lay it low, to hold itself upright in the world.

The prisoner I will call Macklin—a young Scotch girl, who, in the days before Scotland kept its prisoners in its county gaols, was sent from Glasgow to Millbank Prison to work out a long sentence for shoplifting. She was a dark-haired, frank-faced girl. Her demeanour was cheerful, and her readiness to obey orders, and submit to her teachers and masters, speedily attracted some interest towards her. Time, and those spasmodic half-confidences which the prisoners make to their female custodians—confidences that are always more shunned than courted—elicited the few facts of her early life.

She was one of a very disreputable family in Glasgow

—mother, elder brothers and sisters had offered her no good example. She had been early sent on the streets to beg or steal, and had probably received careful training in all that was vile. Begging and stealing had brought many sentences, increasing in length and severity, upon her, until an act of greater daring incurred a seven years' transportation—as it was called then—and brought her, in due course, to Millbank Prison.

She was afterwards one of the early arrivals at Brixton Prison—then recently converted into a female convict establishment—where she worked out that portion of her time necessary to obtain a ticket-of-leave. Altogether her conduct was far above the average; she was a tractable girl, whom a kind word influenced and a gentle remonstrance visibly affected. Attached to the prison matron of her particular ward, who had evinced that interest in her, and manifested that kindness, which a good officer desires not to conceal when the prisoner is doing her best^e to gain her confidence, she served her time out patiently and diligently, and went away with many good wishes for her future well-doing. She departed full of promises; she was certainly going to amend. And the day she stepped beyond the walls she doubtless really intended amendment, and believed in those powers of self-restraint—learned for the first time in a prison—by which she hoped to conquer the early habits to which she had been trained.

Her best friends doubted her promises; for she was returning to Glasgow, where her family still lived, and, consequently, where the greatest danger lay to her moral benefit. Many efforts had been made to induce her to enter a reformatory, but they were unavailing.

She was a tender-hearted girl, and had more love in her heart for her mother and brothers and sisters than they really deserved. She was possessed with a strange yearning for all the old faces; she said she should never see her mother again if she did not take that opportunity to go to Glasgow; the mother was aged, and had written her one or two affectionate letters during her incarceration—return to the old home, and the old haunts, she must!

Her stay at Glasgow, she added, would only be short; she would spend a few days with them all, and then proceed in search of a servant's place and adopt the new life to which she had solemnly pledged herself. At the Euston Square Station she repeated her promise to the matron who saw her start for the North; and the energy with which she called God to witness her intentions to keep pure and honest henceforth, was sufficient to carry conviction even to a listener accustomed to such promises, and knowing too well what fallacies they almost invariably prove.

Some twelve months passed at Brixton Prison; they were beginning to forget Macklin, when the woman who had been a model prisoner, and had gone away resolving to amend, reappeared under the old circum-

stances—found in the bad company she had promised to adjure. So the ticket-of-leave was revoked, and the sentence was to be worked out in full. Her shame and remorse, after the first effort at composure and bravado, were pitiable to witness. She did not mind!—what was to be expected?—who cared for her?—what did it matter to any one save herself?—were her first sullen remarks; but the past associations that the prison brought to her mind, the resumption of the duties which had been given up for liberty, the sorrow and concern of the chaplain, rather than the sharp rebuke for her backsliding—gradually softened a character that twelve months of the old society had tended to harden. She fell once more into the usual routine, exhibiting by degrees almost her former exemplary conduct.

I say almost, for the first year of her new imprisonment witnessed some flashes of irritation and excitability. The matron who had been formerly kind to her had left the service; there were faces amongst the officers which were strange to her—as a rule, I have said, the long hours of duty make havoc in the ranks of prison matrons—and there was one little break-out, one passionate kick to a cleaning pail, offences which were not treated severely, but still sufficient to debar her transfer at a fitting period to Fulham. Still Macklin was a woman who took readily to those who evinced an interest in her, and at the end of the first year she began to betray an attachment—almost the

fond, faithful attachment of a dog to its mistress—for the matron whose duties brought Macklin within her jurisdiction.

Macklin was not long in obtaining her badge, and in procuring, by her diligence and obedience, those little privileges conferred by the prison officers upon their best women. She demonstrated at that time, and till the last day of her sentence, a greater willingness and gentleness than even in the first three years of her incarceration; and evinced every day a greater affection for her matron. She was scrupulously honest in prison, waiting on the matron and attending to her room; when left in charge of it, there were opportunities of abstracting little articles of jewellery, or money, or even a watch, but she never broke the trust placed in her, and remained the honest servant whom nothing could tempt from her fealty. She had always mourned her return to prison, till the matron's interest in her awakened her love; then she gave over repining, and became cheerful, and even happy.

“If I had not come back, lassie, I shouldn't have known ye,” was her remark once; “and had no one to care for me. And ye do care for me a wee bit noo?” was her anxious inquiry.

And the matron did care for her, albeit she constantly made efforts to maintain the grave, equable demeanour expected from prison matrons in general. The matron was more than a common judge of human nature, endowed with rare discriminating powers, and

saw quickly the natural faults of character which had led Macklin wrong in one instance, and might lead her a second time, if steps were not taken to prevent it.

Making no show of an attempt at reformation, keeping back her idea of what was the best and proper method to reform this erring sister, she quietly and unostentatiously began her work, and added this great task to the manifold duties already imperative on her. The chaplain and she were both working for one end ; but the matron's words had the greatest weight with Macklin, for she was loved most, was one of her own sex, to whom the erring woman could tell the whole story of the sin that had ended in shame, and consigned her to the cells of a prison.

To be brief, Macklin changed perceptibly, and became a graver, sadder, and more earnest woman. As her time grew less, the old promises were reiterated—and again doubted by all but the matron and the chaplain. They were both sanguine—this woman was so different from all with whom they had come in contact during the last three years.

There were certainly grave reasons for doubting her promises of amendment. Macklin was once more going back for a day or two to her old haunts at Glasgow. She was anxious once more to see that mother who had, at least, always been kind to her, and was now old and blind ; and to tell her that all the past was forgiven, and that she had made up her mind to lead a new life. Those who heard her could not but

anticipate the danger which she incurred by going, could only express their fears that, as in so many other cases in their experience, the promises she had made of perseverance in the path of virtue would be wrecked.

Prison chaplain and prison matron, however, were hopeful. Class distinctions prevented them working together, and they knew little, if anything, of each other's plans. The chaplain obtained from the Prisoners' Aid Society permission to receive Macklin on her return from Glasgow — a generous concession, that showed no blind bigotry to set rules, and which deserves publicity in this age of stupid precedents.*

As a pleasant picture of the heartiness with which a true Christian works, it may be mentioned here that the chaplain of the prison suddenly woke in his bed one morning, with the terrible thought that the train to Glasgow started early, and that he had forgotten to give the address of the Prisoners' Aid Society to Macklin, who must already have departed with the matron to Euston Square.

Fearing that this little omission might frustrate all the good intentions formed, the chaplain hurriedly dressed himself, ran down the prison lane,—just stopping to inquire of the gatekeeper if the women were gone, and receiving a response in the affirmative. He

* As a rule, a discharged prisoner must proceed direct from the prison to the Prisoners' Aid, depositing her gratuity with the Secretary as a guarantee of good faith.

then went on down the Brixton Road at his utmost speed. It was early morning, there were no omnibuses or cabs on the road, and the chaplain hurried along till a butcher's cart overtook him, and a friendly lift was granted. At last, in a more populous district, a conveyance more fitting the dignity of his cloth was obtained.

Breathless with haste, he finally reached Euston Square, to find a matron and a discharged prisoner waiting on the platform for the train; but the prisoner was not Macklin, nor, in fact, was it the day of her departure, which had been entirely mistaken by the chaplain. It was another woman whose liberty had come, and it was concerning this woman that the gate-porter had responded, and thus deceived the clergyman.

So there remained plenty of time to communicate with Macklin, and the chaplain, on his return, was the first to turn the tables against himself, by a humorous narration of his own blunder to the prison matrons.

Macklin went away two days afterwards, reiterating her promises of amendment. She had been given by the Society a week to return, and she had pledged her word to "enter an appearance" long before the expiration of her days of grace.

"Come and see me, dear Miss ——, at the Prisoners' Aid," was her last injunction, as the train swept her away northwards; "I shall be sure to be there."

She went away full of hope, and the matron was

also sanguine, till the days of the week went on, bringing no news of Macklin—till the week passed, and the Society's doors were closed against the unfortunate woman, who was thrown on the world again—that dark and wicked world which had already been her ruin.

She had broken her word, and there seemed no hope for her. In the last fight the tempter had apparently triumphed. On the very threshold of her new estate her hold had relaxed, and almost within reach of salvation, her weak heart yielded. Hoping to the last, the prison matron wrote to Glasgow, asking Macklin for the particulars of her breach of faith, and, in due course, the reply came—a sorrowful, remorseful reply, that explained everything.

Macklin had reached home, been welcomed by her friends, seen her old mother, and was thinking of her return, when the money that had been set apart to pay her passage back to London was found to have *suddenly disappeared!* There was no hope of her obtaining a sufficient sum to return; she was ashamed to write and tell the story, and she was therefore compelled to remain in Glasgow. A faint hope that her old and true friend would advance the money, and the fear that she had forfeited her right to be believed, and would be left to her misery and degradation, were apparent in the tone and spirit of the letter.

The Prisoners' Aid Society was consulted again; for the energy of the untiring, kind-hearted matron knew no diminution. The point was argued, warmly con-

tested, and the Secretary giving way, consented to receive the repentant woman. The prison matron, from her own hard earned salary, advanced the sum requisite to bring Macklin to London, confiding it to the care of a clergyman in Glasgow.

The passage was paid, and Macklin, on arriving in London, placed herself in the charge of the Prisoners' Aid Society, which shortly afterwards procured her a situation. She entered service as housemaid in a family in the suburbs of London, where her industry and honesty so speedily gained the confidence of her employers, that the house was left to her entire trust and management during the family's absence for six weeks from town. She was still living honestly at the time this book was written, struggling to better her condition, and no one had had cause to regret his or her part in this little drama of real life.

CHAPTER XX.

SUNDAY IN BRIXTON PRISON

It will be interesting to most of my readers to learn how Sunday was spent by our female prisoners at Brixton Prison. When their work was set aside, and the peace and rest natural to the day prevailed even in these prison wards, what was their routine or duty, and how did it affect the convicts?

As a break in the rules and regulations common to working days, Sunday was acceptable to most women. Some little respect is shown for the Sabbath even by the most obstinate prisoners. The instances of insubordination are less on that day than on any other throughout the week. At Brixton Prison, where the privileges were greater than at Millbank, any disturbance on a Sunday was an unlooked-for incident.

In an early chapter on prison routine, I directed the attention of my readers to Millbank, following step by step, to the best of my ability, the progress of a prisoner's every-day life in that place of confinement. In the present, for the sake of a little contrast, I will select Brixton as the subject of my sketch.

It may be premised that, save a greater number of "solitaries," less association, and no tea, the rules were very similar to those of Millbank. In fact, an insight into the working of one prison affords a fair example of the whole system.

As there was some difference between the three classes of prisoners, we will commence with the lowest of the Old Prison women. On Sundays these women were allowed to have an hour's longer rest, rising at seven o'clock in lieu of six, to arrange their cells, &c., preparatory to the breakfast hour.

At a quarter to eight the matron passed down the ward with two women, whose turn it might be to assist, one carrying the cocoa, the other a basket of loaves. The matron stopped at each cell, measured

out the cocoa, and gave a loaf to each woman. The cell door was then shut, and the matron and her attendants proceeded on their way. In the cells of the women in attendance the allotted breakfast portion was left until the round was made, and if any liquid remained at the bottom of the cocoa-can, the women considered it their remuneration for extra services, and appropriated it accordingly. This was not permitted by the rules, but it had become so much a custom of the prisoners and prison matrons, that the withdrawal of this privilege would have entailed no small amount of discontent. As the women waited in turn, no undue preference was evinced.

Breakfast over, the prisoners—with the exception of those who might have been undergoing punishment—were allowed to associate till a quarter past ten. Two remained in a cell, talking in a subdued voice till the chapel bell rang, when the hum of this human hive ceased, and all proceeded in regular order to chapel, passing on to the two upper galleries, and leaving the body for the East and West Wing women. When all the prisoners were assembled, full service was performed; and, considering the nature of these women, and their little powers of self-restraint, the attention they paid, and the good order that was everywhere kept, were remarkable.

That the chaplain's exhortations, for the most part, had but little effect, may be readily imagined from the character of the congregation; but still, here and there,

the good seed fell at times on good ground and bore fruit. Preaching, even in prisons, was not always an idle ceremony — dry, unprofitable, and disheartening. Prisoners' feelings can be touched occasionally. At times there have been evinced as much sorrow and emotion on the part of these careless and hardened women as could have been exhibited by any congregation of gently nurtured, well-educated ladies—once in the very chapel where we suppose our prisoners to have been assembled. It happened that Julia M'Coy one of the prisoners, had died during the previous week; and the officiating minister took advantage of the occurrence to speak of her death, and of the circumstances connected with it, in simple, earnest language, that struck home to these stubborn hearts, and brought tears into all eyes.

It was an affecting sight. Here were women, whose whole term of imprisonment had been an outrage against common sense and propriety, making the chapel echo with their sobs. Some of them had committed murder, infanticide, and other crimes that degrade our poor humanity, and yet they were now weeping like children at the thought of their fellow-prisoner's natural death. The subject was well chosen and skilfully handled. The right chord had been struck. Purer, better thoughts were rising from their souls that morning than any one had ever imagined they were capable of conceiving.

Still, one sermon will not regenerate a prison; and

although some good possibly followed it, yet I cannot honestly aver that there was much sign of general amendment. Some of the women were even so unsettled as to "break-out" shortly afterwards. The new thoughts troubled them, and they were under the necessity of shaking them off, otherwise they would go mad. It was better to be back to the old life than to be troubled with *them*; and so the glass was soon crashing in the wards again, and the dark cells were once more full of inmates!

After chapel was over the prisoners returned to their cells, and waited for dinner, which was ready at a quarter to one. It was served in a similar manner to the breakfast. Before two o'clock all the women were dressed for exercise; at which hour exactly they—the Old Prison women—passed into the airing ground, three wards at a time (only one ward was allowed out on week-days), and walked in pairs round the ground. On Sundays there was often some difficulty in keeping the increased numbers in fair order. They were the lowest class of women, and the least subordinate; and, if the matron were not prompt in checking them, they would stand in little groups, arguing and quarrelling amongst themselves.

This exercise continued till three o'clock, when the women returned to their wards, and were allowed a companion to supper.* The humming of the prisoners'

* It has been already stated that there were no teas, only gruel suppers for prisoners of this class. East Wing women had tea every

voices was heard again. Occasionally the "pals" would become too excited, and talk more loudly than was approved of by their officers. Now and then a merry peal of laughter echoed strangely, almost unnaturally, along the wards, and order was once more enjoined. After tea the chapel bell rang them to evening service, which was concluded at a quarter or twenty minutes past seven, when they were led back to their cells and locked up for the night.

With the East Wing, or second-class women, the routine was somewhat varied. As in the Old Prison, they had their breakfast at a quarter past eight, but at nine in the morning exercise began in the airing ground, where they walked two and two, after the usual fashion, till ten. They attended chapel at the same time as the other women, and were then taken back to their separate cells and dinners. At two they were allowed to sit outside their cell doors and converse; at half-past three they walked again in the airing ground for half an hour or forty minutes, and then, returning, were locked in their cells for supper. The association outside their cells was considered more than equivalent for the association and tea in the Old Prison. There have been instances of prisoners eluding the vigilance of the matrons, and forming little associations of their own.

Monday, Wednesday, and Friday only. Those first-class women for whom there was no room in the West Wing were not included in this rule.

It was an interesting sight to see the prisoners sitting outside their cells until the principal matron's voice was heard pronouncing the order, "Shut your cells." The scene then changed like magic, and, after the rattle, rattle of the closing doors, the ward was left deserted and silent. Women, scheming for extra association, sometimes contrived not to shut their cell doors closely, having insinuated a piece of paper into the lock to prevent an accurate catch. When the matron had gone down the ward, the door was cautiously opened, the prisoner flitted rapidly to her "pal's" cell, turned the handle, and entered.

A discovery was sometimes made, and punishment awarded. Occasionally the prisoner altogether escaped detection—although I fear I shall have some difficulty in inducing any prison matron who may read this to believe my statement.

This trick, I must say, was seldom tried with an old officer. When a young officer, new to the duties, was in charge, the attempt was more often made. When knives were in use amongst the prisoners, they would often betray their secret association by omitting to pass them, according to the general rule, under the doors after dinner.

At twenty minutes to six the chapel bell rang. After chapel the East Wing women were not locked up like those of the Old Prison, but were allowed to sit in association at their cell doors again till a quarter to eight; when the signal was given, the doors were

slammed, and the matron remained alone in the centre of the ward.

The West Wing prisoners, or first-class, were still more favoured. On Sunday, in lieu of an hour and a half, they had two hours' exercise in the airing ground. They had also the privilege of tea.

On Christmas Day there was a general tea and association all over the prison. This was the one exception to the routine of the year.

The women were generally better behaved on Sunday. The best women—those of all classes distinguished for their good conduct—were often grave and thoughtful. Now and then a matron suddenly entering a cell would find a prisoner in tears; and it was always one who had had some semblance of a home in early days, with a kind father and mother.

Such women *must* be touched by these prison Sundays, when they think of the days when they had not gone astray; when the real friends, whose advice they had scorned, were living.

"I'm a-thinking of my old mother, miss," a woman said once; "she'll be going to church now, across the fields—all alone, and thinking o' me who ought to be with her. I went with her every Sunday once," she added, a little proudly.

"This day ten years I was sitting in my Sunday school," another of the well-behaved women would say. "Oh! dear, wasn't I different, miss, then? I never thought of being in this place!"

These remarks cropped out not unfrequently, and were generally made to the matron, very seldom to a fellow-prisoner.

A prisoner is not always in a mood to receive such confidences; and if her disposition is bad, she will probably taunt her companion with her better "bringings up."

Sundays, with the Catholic prisoners, was varied by the performance, between eight and nine in the morning, of divine service by the priest. As this left the day somewhat of blank, some women would attend Protestant service also, whilst others preferred to remain in their cells, and sleep till dinner-time. Many women who were of a brooding or indolent nature were Catholics for no other reason than the Sunday's "skulk," the Thursday's confession from three till four, and the absence from chapel in the week-days. Government shows no religious intolerance in our prisons, and provides a priest for women of the Roman Catholic persuasion—or for such as choose to assert that that is their religion. I wonder if there is a Catholic prison under heaven where a Protestant minister is allowed regularly to attend. I wonder, after all, whether we are quite right in allowing these priests the entry of our prisons.

Sunday, which is a change for the women, offered also some little variation to the matrons, three or four out of each division leaving early in the morning, or on the previous Saturday after six P.M.,—if it were their

night off duty,—and returning at ten P.M. on the evening of the Sunday. Matrons at Brixton and Millbank were granted leave of absence on every third Sunday if there were no matrons ill; some of the chief officers were fortunate enough to have every alternate Sunday at their own disposal.

These were golden days in the matron's calendar!—days so highly prized, and looked forward to so hopefully, that if alternate Sundays had been the general rule, I think the Directors would have been remembered in the matron's prayers. It is beyond my power to describe graphically the sensations of a young woman passing out of the great gates into the free air beyond the prison walls; shaking off the sense of her arduous duties and responsibilities, and looking forward to a day of freedom, with bright and hopeful faces round her. These changes tended to keep the matron healthy, and give her strength of mind to follow on the path of duty and strive for the pension that rewarded ten years' service. But the shadow of prison duties sat upon her even in her holidays, if she were an earnest, thoughtful matron. What she has omitted to do, what she might have done better—whether she was not too harsh in that report, or whether that woman who threatened her life will ever attempt it when a chance presents itself, were thoughts which suggested themselves even in those brighter days that were so few and far between.

But looking back at the title of this chapter, I find I have wandered from the subject: "Sunday in Brixton

Prison." On the evening of that day, the matron might have been seen hurrying down the prison lane, anxious to report her reappearance before the great clock in the archway struck ten. Five minutes after that hour was an infringement of rule, and was punished by a deduction from the salary; and yet, true to woman's habits of unpunctuality, the matrons would linger over the last parting till a little late, the consequence of which would be that a month's drawbacks would tell of a deficit.

At ten o'clock, after a glance at the mess-room, a little chat with the night officer, or with a sister matron who had arrived at the same time, and had some little home incident to relate, the Sunday was at an end for the officers as well as for those whom they held in trust for Government.

CHAPTER XXI.

PRISON CHARACTERS: LETTY COOPER

LIFE is more full of remarkable coincidences than most of us suppose. Strange meetings happen every day. Faces that we thought lost to us for ever rise up in the streets to startle us. I have to record two strange meetings, the narration of which will strike my readers as more resembling those of romance than reality. The more remarkable I reserve for another opportunity; the other forms the subject of this chapter.

A very good and efficient matron—whose name I should like to insert here—was often accustomed to amuse us at the mess-room table by stories of her old home at Norwood. She used to speak of a little dark-faced gipsy girl calling frequently at her father's house near Westow Hill. She was the youngest daughter of the well-known Coopers, and was a sharp girl, strangely shy, though of a bold disposition. The Coopers claimed to be of pure royal blood; and the eldest of the house—an old dark-skinned woman, the grandmother of the little girl I speak of—designated herself the queen of the gipsies, and, amongst the numerous tribes of these wanderers that came and went, her claim to that title did not seem to be disputed.

The grandchild of this royal personage was accustomed to stand before the window, or loiter before the door, of the matron's house, pleased to be noticed, and more pleased by the gift of a stray penny. Occasionally her brother, some years older than herself, would come with her in the hope of obtaining a similar present, and join in the conversation that took place at an open window in the summer time. Both were merry, agile gipsy children, whose gambols on Norwood Common reminded one of acrobatic feats, such as children left to run wild will occasionally imitate.

When the Norwood coach was expected—there were coaches on the road then—Letty and her brother Vangelo were accustomed to run beside it up the hill, throwing those "flip-flaps" and somersaults that have

since become a popular institution amongst our juvenile Bohemians. Other members of the Cooper family speculated in donkeys, patronised little Letty, laughed at her antics, and, doubtless, appropriated the greater part of her pocket-money.

Between Letty and the elder sisters of our matron there was quite an intimacy. Letty, who was a faithful messenger, was frequently employed to run on errands. She would occasionally intercept the ladies in their walks, drop her best curtsey, and look askance at them out of her dark flashing eyes. In their presence she was always demure. If they detected her in any of her gambols on the Common, she would shyly conceal herself behind the furze. In the summer time, before starting down the hill to meet the Norwood coach, she would wreath round her hair a garland of poppies, buttercups, and daisies. Sometimes she would insist on her grandmother thus adorning her. A wild little elf she looked, as she ran beside the coach, with her wreath dropping over her forehead, and her dark eyes half blinded with the dust raised by the wheels.

Leaving Norwood some time after this, the matron lost sight of Letty Cooper. Years brought their usual changes. Deaths and marriages occurred in her family, and, in the course of events, our narrator entered Government service as a prison matron.

At Millbank Prison she met with Letty Cooper again. The latter was now a woman—I regret to add, one of the worst of women. The years that had elapsed

since they last met must have rapidly deteriorated the character of the gipsy girl. The woman had not fulfilled the promise of the girl. Evil passions had stamped their indelible imprint on her face, which was now without a single feminine trait to render it attractive. Although not more than nineteen or twenty, she might have passed for twice that age. Her swarthy and scarred countenance had a settled expression of bold and shameless wickedness, such as one rarely sees in the face of the young.

She was already old in prison experience. She had passed from gaol to gaol, one sentence following fast upon another, and each succeeding period of imprisonment increasing in length. She had passed through an apprenticeship to crime, her acts of violence gradually assuming a more daring and lawless character. She was now a prisoner in Millbank, serving out a sentence of several years for stabbing a man in a drunken brawl.

On one occasion, when associated with her fellow-prisoners in the airing ground, she related to them the particulars of the act of violence for which she was imprisoned. It was told with a good deal of boasting, with some humour, and with much characteristic gesticulation. As a matter of course, it was loudly applauded by the majority of her companions.

“You should have seen the beggar jump when I pricked him—like this somehow,” she was heard to say one day in a whisper to her companions, before she

was warned by some subdued shuffling not to continue the subject.

Letty had not recognised our matron, who did not care to remind her of their past acquaintance. As she was not her officer, she only saw her when her duties took her for a few minutes to that particular ward. Cooper was not long in association. Her propensities for breaking-out were as marked as those of her contemporaries, and she flitted as often as any of them from her cell to the "dark," and from the "dark" to her cell. Being an expert boxer, and possessed of considerable muscular strength, she gave much trouble to the guards who were called in to remove her. Doubling her fists, she would go at her "persecutors" in true prize-fighting style, swearing volubly all the time, and heaping maledictions on every officer's head. In her quiet moods—after her health began rapidly to decline—Letty was fond of discoursing of her royal origin, of her grandmother the queen of the gipsies, and of the reverence which was paid her by all the nomadic tribes in England.

At Brixton Prison she was accustomed to relate strange stories of gipsy life. Many of them were of such a wonderful character that the women would not believe them, and, considering that Letty was rather of a mendacious turn, they were quite justified in their disbelief.

She gave early signs of a consumptive tendency. Prison fare, her own unruly conduct, and, above all,

the want of fresh air, which to a gipsy girl was life, appeared to hasten the progress of the disease. Her spirits became more variable. As for any sign of repentance, it was never expected from one of her callous nature. She was equally profane, both in her quiet and passionate moods. She was inordinately vain of her dancing. When there was a chance of her going through her performances unobserved by the prison authorities, she would amuse her companions by her saltatory feats—leaping, shuffling, cutting sixes, and swirling round and round with marvellous rapidity.

“I was spiled—I ought to have been brought up to the stage, and cut a figure there. I could dance half the actors’ heads off.”

If she was complimented on her skill, and her own favourable opinion of her abilities confirmed by that of her fellow-prisoners, she would be placable for the remainder of the day.

If she was carried to the refractory cells, she would often practise her dancing throughout the night, and keep prisoners and prison matrons restless with her quick beats on the floor. I think she must have had a visionary hope of making her fortune by that art when her liberty was granted.

One of her dances must have been entirely of her own invention, it was so odd and characteristic. There was a peculiar Juba element about it. It consisted of a series of rapid, regular beats with the heel and the toe alternately, which, when heard in the dead of

night, had a frenzying effect on the listener. Occasionally the night matron would attempt a remonstrance, and Letty in return would assail her with a torrent of slang and Romany, dancing all the time to keep herself in practice. Like most of the violent women, whilst the excitement of an outbreak was upon her, she was mad and dangerous. There was no reasoning with her; she had done her worst and been punished to the utmost. Now she would have "her fling," and dance, sing, or do what she pleased. If the matron continued her remonstrance, Letty would fly at the door, beat it with her fists, and scream at the top of her voice.

She became worse. Her strength rapidly failed, and it was thought that she would not live her time at Brixton out.

When she lay very ill in the infirmary, the matron who had known her in old days came to see her, and ventured to speak of the past—to remind her of Norwood, and of the time when she was a little dark-faced girl running wild upon the Common.

"Did you know me then?" she asked curiously.

"Yes."

"Do you remember my grandmother?" she asked; adding, with her old pride, "She was queen of the gipsies, miss. There's been a good many queens amongst the Coopers. We've been allus the head of the gipsies."

She became curious to know in what part of Nor-

wood the matron had lived, and why, if she had recognised her before, she had not spoken to her.

When our fellow-officer reminded her of the time when she used to run messages for her elder sisters, she winced a little, and from that day spoke more deferentially to that particular matron. After recovering sufficient strength to leave the infirmary, she even obeyed instructions from her, which, from others, she would have treated with neglect. But she was untrustworthy and violent to the last.

She continued to regard this matron with considerable interest, and, when she was in one of her better moods, would condescend to address a few words to her.

“Do you remember my brother, Miss ——?” she asked once.

“Vangelo?—to be sure.”

“He’s come to grief too. He’s locked up in prison. We were allus a hot lot!” she added, with a short laugh.

She gradually became weaker, lost her energy, and showed every day sure signs that the sands were running out. All night in the wards, the hollow cough rang out. Every day she became more unable to do her allotted share of work. She became, at last, a confirmed infirmary patient, and used to amuse the other invalids with her old stories of gipsy life, and of the royal blood that circulated in her veins.

“My brother Vangelo would have been king of the gipsies if he had not been lagged,” she boasted.

After her return to the infirmary she sank rapidly. True to the doctor's prophecy, despite all the care and kind attention that sick prisoners receive at Brixton, she breathed her last before her prison service was ended.

CHAPTER XXII.

PRISON MATRONS IN GENERAL: SECOND ARTICLE

REPERUSING my article on Prison Matrons in General, I find that there still remains much to be said concerning them, in order to afford my readers a thorough insight into their duties, and, I may add, into their characters. I reserve for a special chapter a few remarks on matrons' extra duties, and confine myself here to a few discursive anecdotes relating to their position and duties.

I have already spoken of their leading grievance—long hours; but I find that I have omitted to mention that which some years ago tended to make those long hours more wearisome and unendurable—a want of proper, and, at times, wholesome food. I have no doubt that this plain statement gave rise at the time to many angry denials on the part of those interested in the matter; still it is due to society to state proofs in support of my old complaint.

In the first place, I may state that the meat provided for the prisoners was generally of a good quality;

but by some strange inconsistency, or by some mismanagement in the cookery, that provided for the prison matrons was not always good, and, at times not few and far between, decidedly and disgracefully bad.

I do not know, I have never sought to inquire, what the opinion of the warders on this point might have been—they had stronger stomachs and coarser appetites, mayhap—but it was certainly true that, in the matrons' mess-room, the joints occasionally went away untasted, and, such was the objection of the matrons to "fussiness," often uncomplained of. Ribs of beef, and legs and shoulders of mutton, were the staple commodities of diet; but beef and mutton of so extraordinary a flavour, that the riddle was on what green pastures these oxen and sheep could have been originally fattened, or with what strange compound the joints could have been basted in the prison kitchen, to give to their remains so extraordinary a flavour. So peculiar goatish was it at times, that "goat," at our female Government prisons, had become the general appellative for mutton; and as it is like no other mutton either at home or abroad, perhaps one name was as good as another.

The complaints of matrons were not many; the great question being, of whom to complain? We do not suppose for an instant that the great contractors examined every joint sent out to Government establishments, or that the contractors' deputies were ever very particular about the matrons' health, or that the

prison steward was expected to be taster in ordinary, or inspector-general of the prison kitchen. The question was—of whom could the prison matrons obtain redress, or from whom might information be expected? In a Parliamentary inquiry into Government Contracts in 1856, the question was put to one witness—whether he thought Government contracts were fulfilled as faithfully as other contracts, and he expressed it as extremely doubtful. Whether this accounted for oily beef and goatish mutton, I am not able to decide.

But I know that beyond the prison walls there was a gentleman who held office under Government, and whose business it was to see that the contracts for his department were faithfully fulfilled, who plainly asserted that it was his greatest trial to see that Government was fairly dealt by. He added that attempts to sap his honesty were frequently made in his early days of office, and were made indirectly still; that invitations to contractors' shooting-boxes, country residences, &c., were being constantly pressed upon him, and that his acceptance of a handsome Christmas box would have been considered as a favour. Are there any handsome presents made, and kind invitations given now, to gentlemen in prison office, whose verdict on the meat might make matters unpleasant to contractors?—or is the fault really in the cooking after all? At times the matrons protested, but the steward asserted that he saw nothing wrong in the meat, that it was very good meat, *considering*, and he has sometimes recommended the ladies

of — ward to be a little less particular. And that kind advice was attended to. Perhaps it *was* only fancy after all, and the prison air had spoiled the appetite, and rendered the ladies fastidious! The next day, therefore, the matrons sat down “with a will,” and tried to laugh the matter off, but the old flavour was still predominant. There would be no remonstrance perhaps for a week or two after that. The prison matrons would substitute suppers at their own expense in lieu of mess-room dinners. If another feeble remonstrance were made, the steward shook his head and mourned over the fastidiousness of human nature, that would not see every excellence in prison cooking and contractors’ mutton.

Sometimes the surgeon was solicited for his verdict on the question, which he usually gave to the effect that *he* could not see much the matter with the meat. One gentleman actually fell into raptures over a plateful of mutton which had made half the prison matrons sick. He only wished that such meat were provided for his own table, that was all!

As prison matrons were always considered in the wrong, and complaints of this nature were regarded in a light almost impertinent, it was considered policy at last to swallow anything, and say nothing. But if a Director or Governor even in these latter days would look in at the mess-room dinner-hour, and try an honest plateful—not a fastidious, mincing nibble, be it understood—the chances are that the standard of wholesome food would be more regularly obtained.

Attempts have been made more than once to memorialise the authorities on the subject, but the nervousness with which strong measures are generally regarded has always interfered with the project, some refusing to sign from the fear of dismissal. In many instances there are mothers, sisters, and little children to support, and rather than incur any risk, they endure this with all the other evils that "flesh is heir to."

Still, I reiterate, there is much good feeling shown by the heads of the establishment to the matrons, and it is rarely that any one in authority stands upon the order of his or her dignity.

It is pleasant to speak of the frequent efforts of the principals to offer some little change, after the hours of duty, to the matrons. Reading-rooms have been thought of, and abandoned. At Brixton the experiment was tried, some years ago, of a little music, in a room across the yard. But the music led to a quadrille now and then, and it was thought advisable to send the piano back to the maker, and rescind the privilege.

I do not know that any privilege within the prison would be very acceptable to the matrons; such is their craving, when health and strength permit, to pass beyond the gates and shake the prison dust from their feet. Outside may be waiting mother, sisters, even faithful swains, and the busy streets appear to them like another world. At ten o'clock the matrons must be home again, or fines, averaging from sixpence to five shillings, will follow each minute's delay.

It is strange how well the faces of prison matrons were known in old days to the cabmen on the ranks adjacent to both female prisons. A prison matron in Palace Yard, for instance, was a signal for the hasty disappearance of the majority of the cabmen from the ranks. If one were addressed, a solemn assurance was given that they were every one engaged to gentlemen at the "House"—sixpenny fares—which were in vogue then—being very much objected to. Thus officers who had lingered to the last moment with their friends found themselves greatly impeded in their attempts to reach Millbank in time to save a fine and a report.

Matrons had their little parties at times too—quietly smuggled parties of three or four favourite sisters—in their bedrooms, after the mess-room supper was over, and when it was supposed that all female officers were in their beds. But these were golden days—occurring only once a year—and as they were contrary to rule, I must not say too much about them. They were happy little meetings, however, all the more delightful perhaps for the fear of discovery. Mice will play when the cat's away, even in so uncongenial a place for honest merriment—within the "limits of becoming mirth"—as a Government prison.

The matrons have their little jealousies as well as their little loves and likings for each other. The sudden rise of a clever officer leads here and there to a faint exhibition of uncharitableness. "Promoted by merit" is a phrase hard for old officers to understand, especially

those who have no particular merit to boast of. Still, in all offices, these little *contretemps* occur. Perhaps there is a little more excitement in the prison than in the outer world when the chance of a rise occurs, and feelings of disappointment at the result are expressed more openly than amongst the clerks at Somerset House or the Bank of England, for the female nature is not reticent, and ladies will speak their minds occasionally. I have only to say, with regard to the promotions, that they appear to have been always made with great fairness and discrimination. No injustice, and very little favouritism, are apparent in the appointments.

I have already spoken of the steady rise of one officer from the post of assistant-matron to that of deputy superintendent. I should not be doing justice to another very efficient deputy, if I failed to mention the name of Mrs. Harpour, late of Brixton Prison, and afterwards of Fulham Refuge.

I consider that much of the effective discipline of Brixton Prison was due to this lady's former connection with it. She was the originator of many clever rules, for which she is entitled to the highest credit.

Amongst the officers of Millbank Prison, let me express my honest conviction that, for tact, judgment, and perseverance, Miss Cosgrove, matron of that establishment, stood pre-eminent in her day.

In concluding this part of my subject, I would wish to suggest a change of name for prison officers. Possibly it is not a matter of much importance, but

“officer” is almost a noun masculine, “matron” is altogether a misnomer, and both names convey an idea of harshness and ugliness singularly at variance with the bearers thereof. If “sisters” were not too Roman Catholic a term, or did not suggest the nunnery so strongly, I know of no more appropriate designation. They are sisters in their efforts to do their duty, and to work, in their humble way, some little good—sisters in their interest for those poor creatures who are confided to their care—and sisters in their friendship and good-will towards each other.

CHAPTER XXIII.

PRISON CHARACTERS: TOWERS

IN Colonel Chesterton’s “Revelations of Prison Life,” the author prefaces his remarks on one or two prisoners by stating that it would be false delicacy to conceal their true names under initials or assumed cognomens. If that remark applies to any of the characters in this chronicle of prison life, it does assuredly to Towers.

There are no feelings to outrage in her case; her acts of violence were always a subject of much boasting; all sense of shame or common decency must have been stifled in her infancy. Still I do not adopt her real name; she is of an honest family, and may be leading a new life.

Towers was sentenced to four years' penal servitude for stealing from the person, and the day of her introduction to Millbank Prison was a sad one for the prison officers. Not that she was the most violent woman who ever entered, for physical reasons, hereafter to be mentioned, prevented that; but she was the most untruthful, malicious, lewd, and horrible being that ever prison matrons had hitherto met with.

It is with some reluctance that I attempt to describe this woman, but it may be interesting to students of human nature to have an outline of her character—albeit it is impossible to fill in all the shadings with that depth and intensity necessary for a truthful portraiture.

There is much in prison detail that is unapproachable; and the story of Towers's prison life cannot be dwelt on in all its horrible minuteness. Two men, whose minds loved to grope in dark places, might have been glad of such an eccentric character for a story or romance—Edgar Allan Poe and Eugene Sue.

Towers was not more than three or four and twenty—in the prison books, I believe, her age is registered as less than that—when she first entered Millbank Prison. Physiognomists might have guessed much of her character from her countenance—it was so disproportionate and revolting. A white-faced ape would have been something like her; and there was a look in her black eyes which one shuddered to encounter. She was a cripple, and had to be carried in. The loss of the use

of her limbs, however, by some early accident, had been no check upon her criminal propensities. In a word, she was all that was bad—even the prisoners were horrified at her.

“She’s like the devil hisself, isn’t she, miss?” one woman, who was not noted for good behaviour herself, remarked once. How she reached Brixton, save on medical grounds, I have been at a loss to discover; but certain it is that thither she was conveyed in due course, being carried from a cab through the prison yards to the cell set apart for her.

She was accustomed to lie on her bed for several days together refusing to get up—alleging, with the most awful oaths, her inability to move; praying, with a horrible earnestness, that further calamities might fall upon her; and that blindness, leprosy, and fifty other ills might seize upon those who worried her by entreating her to rise. I do not remember that she ever went into the airing yard by her free will, or by compulsion either. She had a morbid satisfaction in remaining in bed, in using every endeavour, by refusing food, and even by injuring herself, to make herself ill. Blaspheming and singing were her two principal employments. If needlework was given her, she would tear her work to pieces, and swallow the needle to alarm the matron. She was taken to the refractory cells at times, but her crippled condition rendered her removal from them again instantly necessary. The means by which she inflicted injury on herself were sometimes horribly

ingenious. She would secrete a piece of glass about her clothing, open her veins with it, and allow them to bleed freely, giving no hint of what she had done. It was only her gradual faintness that gave the alarm, and brought relief to her, otherwise she would probably have bled stoically to death in her bed. And this happened not once or twice, but frequently. The closest watching could not prevent her injuring herself.

It soon became absolutely necessary to have a special cell for her, with two women constantly in attendance. Even with these precautions, she would manage to hide pieces of glass, or jagged pebbles, in her bed; and it became often necessary to remove her, without any warning, to another cell, and carefully searching her own to remove from it all the dangerous materials which she had collected. By some unsolvable mystery, however, she was never without the means of injuring herself, and a horrible gash was often exhibited when least expected. If she was anxious to be taken to the infirmary, some such scheme she would always adopt, despite the vigilance of the officer; and even there, she has been known to continue the practice of self-injury till her life was despaired of.

She always rallied, however, and allowed herself sufficient time to recover some of her old strength before she would proceed to open her veins again. Indeed there was a business-like method in her manner of going to work. By way of change she would sometimes powder her glass and swallow it, thus bringing on

internal hæmorrhage—a practice adopted by more than one prisoner at both Millbank and Brixton.

In her cell, as in the infirmary, Towers knew no respect for time or place. Her principal amusement in either was lying on her back, and yelling, at the top of her voice, Dick Turpin's supposed song of "My bonny black Bess."

"Then while I've a bottle, what can I do less,
Than drink to the health of my bonny black Bess,"

became as familiar to the ears of the prison matrons of Towers's ward as to any lover of Bacchanalian songs at a low beer-shop.

She had also some talent for extemporising ballads—neither appropriate, select, nor decent—in which the names of her officers were brought in, coupled with much violent and abusive language; but her efforts generally were not well sustained, and after a while she would slide back into "My bonny black Bess."

Sometimes she would lie in bed and scream for help till assistance arrived, when she would struggle up into a sitting posture and fling every available utensil in her cell at the light, or at the heads of the officers—she was not particular which—accompanying each effort with an oath, or a horrible expression that made the blood run cold.

There were times when she could be persuaded or humoured into quietness, but the continuance of her good behaviour was uncertain, and she always wound up with one of her extraordinary feats. Despite her

inability to make use of her limbs, she was ingenious enough in "breaking-out." When she was considered safe and quiet for the night, and too weak to do much mischief, she would wriggle out of bed, shuffle herself to the cell walls, to which she would cling with one hand, smashing the glass with the other, and shrieking all the while like an imp of darkness. When the men were sent to remove her, she had a peculiarly vicious way of resisting them. She would butt at them with her head, and before her habits were known, the guards, unprepared for this mode of attack, lost several teeth, and received many black eyes. In the infirmary she would suddenly drop from her bed, and, with an eel-like writhe, make for the bedside of other prisoners, and with demoniac satisfaction smash the basins that might be there. Attached to the infirmary there were three cells for such patients as were refractory even in their illness. The one most remote from the infirmary was generally Towers's habitation during the period of her illness or convalescence; and at all hours of the day and night the sick women would be kept restless by that abominable refrain of "drinking to the health of my bonny black Bess," which she would continue to ring out with untiring energy.

"Oh! how I *do* wish that cussed Towers was dead!" an invalid, turning restlessly in her bed, would exclaim; but Towers continued to live, a torment to all in the prison, opening veins with impunity, and, at the imminent risk of breaking a blood-vessel, singing, or

rather shouting out at the top of her voice, the praises of "my bonny black Bess."

It became necessary at last to construct a special "convalescent cell" for Towers. An unoccupied room among the dark cells was set apart for her, where, with two female prisoners ever on the watch, she, struggling against death, continued to drag out her restless and unruly life.

Towers served her time out at Brixton. Defiant and blasphemous, violent and malicious, to the last, she wore out the patience both of prisoners and matron with her inharmonious praises of Dick Turpin's mare. She was prudent or artful enough to give up the lacerating process during the last few months of her time, that she might gather up some of her old strength for the world into which, an obstinate enemy to its laws, she was again about to enter.

On the day of her liberty she was carried to her cab in charge of a matron, who saw her safely off to Manchester, from which city it was feared she would again appear to horrify the prison service. So vivid was the impression she left behind, that the vision of her corpse-like face, and reminiscences of the words in which she sung the praises of Bonny Black Bess, have since disturbed the rest of many a matron.

CHAPTER XXIV.

PRISONERS' FREEMASONRY

NOTWITHSTANDING the vigilance of matrons, and the incessant watching to which prisoners are subjected, the latter still contrive to correspond with each other by looks and signs, and even by letters.

Amongst the regular professional thieves there exists a freemasonry very difficult for the matron to detect, and yet simple and comprehensible to those who practise it. Thieving amongst the "regulars" has become a well-disciplined profession. There are many adepts in the art, and each has a favourite school of disciples. "Jenkinson's School," "Watson's School," and "Smith's School" are the names of these select academies, and the first inquiry with which one thieving prisoner accosts another is, "What *school* do you belong to?"

In these schools the lessons of crime, which is now reduced to a theory, are readily learned by apt pupils, who calculate to a nicety the chances for and against detection. It is said that for one who is captured there are twenty who escape; and in their own opinion it is not the fault of the system they have been taught, but their own ill-luck, or the unskilful manner in which they have practised the principles of their art, that has brought them within the clutches of the law.

The disciples of certain "schools" have peculiar marks, rendered black by gunpowder, tattooed on their

arms. Anchors, crosses, and initials are common decorations. Five spots on the left arm are the sign of one school, and three spots between the finger and thumb the distinguishing mark of another.

One woman, who, late in life, had grown tired of the "schools," and thought of turning over a new leaf, consulted the surgeon as to the best means of eradicating the sign that distinguished her as an adept in crime.

"It's such a disgrace, sir; I must have it out."

The surgeon paying no heed to her request, or thinking the operation impracticable, the woman proceeded, by means of friction, to wear the skin away into "a fox-bite," which she afterwards put under a course of impromptu poultices, &c., until she succeeded in giving herself a bad arm.

The arm, being subjected to medical treatment, was cured, but, to the intense disgust of the branded one, the mark came out more brilliantly than ever.

The chief means by which correspondence is carried on between women located in different wards, or in cells some distance apart from each other, are the gas-papers, seven of which are given to each prisoner at the beginning of the week—one for each night's gas. Every evening the matron, passing down the ward, calls out "gas-paper," and one is passed through the inspection hole in the door, lighted by the matron's candle, and drawn in again by the prisoner, who is supposed to light her gas with it, the matron outside the cell having by this time turned it on.

Several *ruses* are resorted to in order to obtain extra gas-papers. "The paper has gone out, miss;" "There's wind in the pipe, and it won't light;" and "The paper's burnt out, miss," &c. As the gas is escaping all the time it is impossible to argue the matter with the prisoner, and the extra paper is generally thrust through to her.

On these papers, or "stiffs" as the women invariably term them, are written messages to other prisoners. Words of affection occasionally pass between them; offers to consider some one as a pal from that time forth are made; arrangements for a little break-out, by way of diversion, are communicated; or threats of giving up the person addressed as a pal, and of taking to some one whom she has always liked better—and "so she tells her!"—are sent by this medium.

These messages fly so frequently from one part of the prison to another, and are the cause of so much dissension and excitement amongst the prisoners, that the total suppression of "stiffs" has been more than once under consideration. But it would be difficult to make any other arrangement for the lighting of the prison cells. If the matron were to do it herself, it would entail much extra labour on her. I believe the practice is in vogue to this day.

The means by which they manage to write, to obtain the stump ends of lead pencils—even pens and ink—I will attempt to explain in another chapter. At present it is sufficient to state that the materials for correspondence are almost invariably at hand.

The means by which these messages are conveyed are equally ingenious, and often completely baffle the matron. The difficulties in the way of corresponding with a pal form quite an agreeable excitement in prison life. The pals are, as a rule, in different wings. No one would take the trouble of corresponding with a next door neighbour; but the difficulty of communicating with a pal in a distant wing is a great stimulus to the restless spirit of these women.

The prisoners are obliging to each other. A "stiff" will sometimes have to pass through twenty hands before reaching the woman for whom it is intended. When all the ordinary means of transmission fail, the method of throwing messages written on small pieces of paper at chapel is adopted. The billet is thrown at a moment when the matron's eyes are in another direction, and in nine cases out of ten no discovery is made until the woman who has been so fortunate as to receive the message intended for her betrays the fact by her excitable demeanour.

The prisoners are not faithful in their friendships: on the contrary, they are treacherous, deceitful, and terribly jealous. The tenor of one half the missives is generally a change of pals; and as uncomplimentary epithets are freely used, the recipient resents the affront by an attack on prison property.

The few prisoners contented with a less difficult mode of correspondence tap on the walls of their cells, and thus keep each other company. These were the Old

Prison women at Brixton, who had not much association until their general behaviour was put to the test.

Prisoners in the same division find means of corresponding as they pass down the wards to chapel. As the women file by the cells, the doors of which are open, a gas-paper, carefully screwed up, is flung into the well-known cell of the pal with whom communication is desired, and it is generally found by the woman on her return.

Of course such acts as these are punishable when they are discovered, as many of them are, by the matron; but the ingenuity to deceive is so constant and persistent that if every prison officer had the eyes of Argus the women would still be corresponding.

The rapidity with which news will spread is another remarkable feature of prison life. "Smith has broken out in the Old Prison," soon got wind in the East or West Wing of Brixton; "Jones is coming back to Pentagon 2, and coir-picking," would circulate through the pentagons at Millbank.

Even the news of the day is often current amongst prisoners. Being greedy for intelligence, and ever on the watch for it, they have quick ears to catch a whisper of the matron's—they know who is going to leave and who will be promoted as soon as the officers themselves. At school, in the kitchen, in the laundry, at chapel, signs are made and notes exchanged. One matron cannot baffle fifty women determined to have a little talk or to learn the prison news.

Between those who have not been lucky with their "stiffs," or who are not content with them—or those who cannot write, and so find "stiffs" of no account—there is a species of talk which is more marvellous than any other kind of freemasonry to which I have alluded.

At Brixton chapel, where one body of wing women was divided by nearly fifty feet from another, a prisoner, in the middle of service, would look across at her pal, and begin to talk *silently* to her. The lips moved, the words were evidently pronounced to herself, but not a syllable disturbed the service or reached the prison matron near her; and yet the woman in the distance understood all that was said, and returned a reply in the same manner.

Much study of this mode of correspondence, an accurate acquaintance with the shape of the mouth in forming certain words, and uncommon powers of observation, are all necessary to render this scheme successful. Plans of opposition have been formed, new friendships avowed, old ones broken off or renewed, insults given and received, and news of the prison world circulated extensively by these means; yet in the midst of it all strict silence and an apparent attention to the minister's discourse has been maintained.

At Millbank, by means entirely unaccountable, letters from the women have even found their way to the men's side of the prison. There is also one instance on record of a woman succeeding in communicating with the outer world. This was in the old transporta-

tion days, when a boat was accustomed to arrive in the early morning at Millbank stairs, to take the prisoners away to the convict ship waiting for them in the Pool. Although the time of departure had not been communicated to the prisoner I mention, it was discovered by her, and the news forwarded to her husband—a free man, and I believe an honest one.

The idea is generally entertained that her husband's knowledge was obtained from sources of his own; but it was the woman's triumphant avowal on board ship that she was his only informant. Whether right or wrong, certain it is that, when the transport women were crossing from the prison gates to the water side, the guards in attendance were thrust aside by a burly figure, and before he could be prevented, the husband was hugging in his arms the unfortunate woman whom crime had separated from him. Their meeting was a brief one, and it was not harshly interrupted. Prison matrons, and even prison guards with guns upon their shoulders, have hearts within their breasts, and are as feeling as other men and women whose duties do not bring them into contact with the off-scourings of society. The husband kissed his wife, no rough hand fell too quickly on his shoulder, and there were tears even in the eyes of the guard who warned him to stand back.

Some such romantic incident will occasionally interrupt the monotony of prison life. Fancy, affection, and the better feelings of human nature, are sometimes

found within the high walls that separate the inmates of a gaol from the busy world without.

As "there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy," so there are more things to be wondered at and mourned over in our prisons than even Directors have yet imagined. If the hearts of these prison women could be laid bare, who can say that some story as moving, as interesting, as any recounted by poet or novelist, might not be revealed? The matter for a thousand books may be floating amidst the desolate wards that echo to these women's sighs, or ring with their defiance. Theirs have not been quiet lives, and from the elements of life's discord spring the incidents that interest mankind.

CHAPTER XXV.

EXTRA DUTIES OF MATRONS

THE extra duties of a prison matron are not the most arduous appertaining to her peculiar profession; on the contrary, very many of them are pleasant changes from the usual every-day monotony, and as such are welcomed and striven for.

Of those that are not agreeable changes, it may be as well to speak in the first place. In addition to seeing a refractory prisoner removed, there is an unpleasant patrolling necessary when an outbreak has

happened in the night: for it is essential to use every endeavour to keep the rest of the women from following the evil example.

Under these circumstances, after a prisoner has been removed to a refractory cell, one or two matrons are often awakened, and it becomes their duty to patrol the deserted wards until the startled prisoners subside in their beds and mutter themselves to sleep.

“That’s how that Smith always does it,” may be the prisoner’s remark—“as if she couldn’t wait a proper time, and not wake everybody up like this!”

The disadvantages of a small staff of matrons become painfully apparent when an officer falls sick—sometimes two at once. Cheerfully and willingly as extra duty is performed by those in better health, the extra labour, in this instance, tells upon the staff, saps at its strength, and confines the matrons to the prison for many days together.

Some one’s “night out” must be given up two or three times at least, and some one’s Sunday holiday passed over, when the sick matron is in her room incapacitated from public service. The work goes on steadily—the smaller staff work with a will, and lock and unlock their greater numbers with the same precision. In ordinary times one matron of a wing at Brixton, for example, was accustomed to lock and unlock women *six hundred times a-day*—that is to say, that every prisoner was locked and unlocked twelve times, and there were fifty prisoners to a ward—occa-

sionally even fifty-one. When, as it sometimes happens in the summer time, six or seven matrons are sick or absent on leave, the excitement and hard work of the remaining officers are pitiable to witness. Double duty, and little chance of enjoying fresh air, constitute an existence which no white slave need envy.

Surely the bright days will come for these quiet faithful prison servants to be rewarded with a little less daily toil and a little more necessary recreation.

“How you ladies manage to live, in such a constant state of excitement, is a puzzle to us on the men’s side,” a Millbank warder said once to a matron. “Our hours are as long, but the male convicts are quiet and rational, and obey orders. It must be a hard time for all of you.”

And the warder is not the only one in prison service who entertains the same opinion.

An officer on escort is an extra duty more pleasant, and as there are several varieties of escort, I will briefly touch upon them.

The briefest variety was the transfer of Millbank women to Brixton, or Brixton good-conduct women to Fulham Refuge. A matron was put on escort duty, and sat near the door of the omnibus which was to take the prisoners from Millbank to Brixton; she was responsible for their good behaviour during the transit, and was expected to watch them closely and restrain any excitability. Outside on the step a male guard used to station himself, in case of any attempt to over-

power the matron and escape—in very exceptional cases an extra guard was placed on the box by the side of the driver. The omnibus full, or half full, as the case might be, the prison gates were opened, and the equipage rattled away over Vauxhall Bridge, and down the South Lambeth Road, across the Clapham Road, by the “Swan” at Stockwell, towards the Brixton Road.

The women were always well-behaved; the excitement of the change, the consciousness that it was one step forward, one step nearer liberty and the old gangs—or the old friends, I will not be too severe—kept them in good spirits. The behaviour of these women was worth remarking—their excitability, their whispered observations on everything that passed, or was passed by them, in the world they caught a flying glimpse of once again.

“Everything looks so large, miss,” was the remark of one prisoner to the matron; “it isn’t like the streets and houses somehow. It’s something new and BIG!”

And this impression seemed conveyed to the minds of most women. What a large dog!—what a large horse!—what large gardens to all the four courts! It almost appeared as if ten or twelve months’ confinement to a narrow cell had diminished their powers of comparison, and narrowed their busy, plotting minds.

Spasmodic observations on the passers-by were not unfrequent, despite all efforts to keep silence. “That’s like my brother Jack”—“That’s like my mother.”

At the corner of the Vauxhall Bridge Road, before

the railway arch was passed under, and the Vauxhall Station reached, there was an evident anxiety to see the shops amongst the London-bred girls—it was like the old times to see the shops!

Women would slyly turn round in their seats, or lean over their fellow-prisoners, to look at the play-bills before the doors of the tobacconists.

“I wonder what’s out now at the Vic. or the Surrey—oh! what treats I have had there!” a woman once sighed in confidence to her neighbour. “Weren’t they jolly nights up in the gallery at Christmas time?”

“Ah! it was all along o’ the play I ever came here!” a woman was heard once to mutter in response.

It’s always along o’ something! The play, the concert-room, the streets, the false friend who tried to lead her wrong, and she so innocent!—the bad advisers, the cruel mother, father, husband, anybody—never her own weakness, or headlong desperate plunge to ruin!

In the suburban roads there was a touching anxiety to see the flowers in the gardens, or the trees springing up therefrom. Flowers and trees were novelties with Millbank women, and there was a yearning gaze directed to each front garden. Occasionally a child, all life and light, danced along the road, and escaped not criticism, being compared to little girls that they had known, or the little girls that they were once themselves.

Sometimes a reminiscence of the past would leap to the surface, perhaps in this fashion:—

“Do you see that house there, Jane?”

“With the brass knocker?”

“With the black 'un, you fool!—next door!”

“Ah, yes! Well?”

“I was a servant there once. I ran away from there—they didn't treat me well enough!”

“Didn't they, though?”

Perhaps the assertion would be received altogether as an impromptu fiction, originated by the speaker for the sake of effect, in which case a very plain “What a lie!” rewarded the giver of the intelligence. The matron would command silence, and the male officer on the step threatened to report the talker, and take her back with him.

“What a short ride!” was the exclamation, as the omnibus turned into the prison lane, and the view of the outer world began to narrow every instant.

From Brixton to Fulham is almost a repetition sketch; the journey to Fulham was of greater length, and the scenery more diversified. There was Clapham Common to wish to be wandering over; there was Battersea Park to gaze at, and the river to cross by Battersea Bridge; and the steamers, and the barges coming lazily down with the tide, and the row boats flashing on the water, to comment upon.

“Isn't this first-rate!” exclaimed once an exultant prisoner; “and they're all at chapel now at Brixton!”

Conveyance from Brixton to Fulham was effected by hired flies in lieu of omnibus; the numbers were less

who sought the "Refuge," its doors being only open to the best of women.

Another feature of escort duty is worthy a remark or two, although the practice is at an end, or at least very rarely occurs. It was customary, in times past, for a child of two years old, born in prison, to be passed on to those friends willing to receive it; or, if there were no friends willing—which was very often the case—to that parish to which it had a legal claim. In most cases the child now remains with its mother until the latter's term of imprisonment is ended. Which is the more merciful rule, it is extremely difficult to say.

In the past, then, it became an extra duty much coveted amongst prison matrons to escort a child to its grandfather, or grandmother, or uncle, who in all probability would be resident in the country. Far away journeys have been taken with these prison children under the old rule—a day and a night's absence, sometimes two, being allowed for the departure and return, and all expenses paid. And the child's amazement at its new position in society, and the child's belief in the prison matron's power to protect it, keep it from harm, and work any amount of wonders, was singular, and at times affecting.

More singular and affecting still, the meetings of the friends with this little transplanted prison flower. If respectable people, as occasionally might be the case, there was the curiosity to see what the "girl's bairn" was like, struggling with the effort to restrain a pas-

sionate outburst in the matron's presence. I have heard many affecting anecdotes from matrons of these visits.

One in particular, where a prison boy turned from the grandfather and grandmother he had never seen, went rushing back to the matron's skirts, hid himself in the folds thereof, and cried to be taken back to "mammy." Anything in his young life for the old prison and the prison toys, and the faces that were not so strange to him!

Then there was the sad duty of leaving a child down some court or alley in Liverpool or Manchester to the charge of a wrinkled harridan, or a coarse-featured, repulsive-looking young woman, with crime stamped upon every feature, and the returning with the sorrowful prescience of how the story of that child's life must infallibly end.

Despite the alterations which have curtailed the duties of escort, there is still the chance now and then of a day's special service in the country. Women who are sick or ill are not sent home unattended; to the last there is considerable kindness shown to the prisoners. With a sick prisoner a matron is sent as escort, and the parting with the woman is made at her own door, with her own friends round her.

I remember hearing of one painful escort home of a woman who had made undue efforts to muster strength for her departure, and would hear of no persuasions to remain a day or two longer in the infirmary. The liberty order was made out, and go she must! There

was no law in England to stop her—hadn't she been a prisoner long enough?

She was persuaded to allow of an escort to her friends in the country—I believe it was a journey into Wales—and all the long railroad journey the woman sat and struggled for life, and grew worse and worse at every stage, until the matron feared she would die upon the road.

“Oh! I've made up my mind to reach home, miss,” she answered, with a ghastly smile, to the solicitations of the matron to rest awhile and undertake the remainder of the distance the next day, and no persuasion could shake the liberty woman's resolutions.

The station was reached, a fly procured, and the home arrived at; and the woman died the same night in the arms of the friends she had striven so hard to see gathered round her once again.

Escort from Millbank or Brixton to the railway station was a more common duty, and not sought for in the least. To rise an hour or an hour and a half before the usual early time for rising, and set forth in the raw morning, often the dense dark morning in the winter time, in a hired fly to the railway station, was not an enviable task; more particularly as the matron was expected to return by breakfast time, and was put on full prison duty for the remainder of the day.

Still, it was a task performed with animation and interest; there was something satisfactory in seeing a prisoner at her best; in witnessing her suppressed

state of happiness at the end of the long years of imprisonment—after all the praying, all the despair, all the breakings-out!

The woman, as a rule, was strangely shy and embarrassed at the railway station; the matron used to caution her to remain stationary whilst she purchased the ticket for her journey, and as a rule she never wandered from her post to look about her at the bustling world. To use an old word, she was “dazed”—the contrast was too vivid; she was waking from an ugly dream, and could not understand it yet.

Meanwhile the policeman at the station had recognised the prisoner’s “out dress,” perhaps the prisoner’s face, which was familiar to him, as one he may have seen from the felon’s dock; he kept his watch upon her without being over-obtrusive, observed which carriage she entered, and communicated his information to the guard, in case of anything going wrong during the journey.

Then the prisoner had to wish the matron good-bye, and the train sped away with her homewards, she sitting very quietly in a corner of a third-class carriage, with a bundle in her lap.

There is a little sentiment occasionally in these partings. If the matron on escort be a favourite, the woman will shower all the blessings of life upon her, and go away weeping bitterly at the parting; at times there was only a gruff “good-day to you,” and a glimpse of a morose, dissatisfied countenance as the train moved off.

Only one instance of ingratitude and of wanton wickedness have I known in these departures, and that was the prisoner picking the pocket of the matron who had had the charge of her for several years, had been always kind to her, and for whom the woman had feigned, in her way, some affection. The matron was doubtful if the act was really committed by the woman—or expressed, for the woman's sake, her doubts—and no efforts were made to arrest the woman on a new charge at her journey's end. Fortunately, there was not a large amount in the purse; and the woman, with her ill-gotten gains, was allowed to proceed on her way.

Proceeding to Fisherton used to be another extra duty—the last of any importance that I need dilate upon. This was a railroad trip to Salisbury, from which city Fisherton Lunatic Asylum was but an easy distance; and thither two matrons, or two matrons and a male officer, conveyed those unhappy prisoners whose sentence had not expired, but whose minds had given way beneath the monotony of their position, or the dark thoughts natural to severe confinement, or for other reasons beyond human power to define.

Concerning these mad prisoners I shall devote some space in a future article, and need not detain the reader here to speak of them. Suffice it to say, in this place, that this escort employment was not the most agreeable, although the journey to Salisbury *was* a change, and valued as a set-off against the dark side of the expedition.

In the case of a refractory mad prisoner, Government is put to considerable expense for special carriages; but these poor benighted fellow-creatures of ours are, as a rule, very meek and tractable on escort journeys—children of a larger growth, to be amused by a word.

At Fisherton, after the prisoners were delivered, there remained an hour or two, perhaps, to spend in Salisbury, with a pleasant glimpse of green fields and hedge-rows to be thought of in the future, when the long hours had come back again.

CHAPTER XXVI.

PRISON CHARACTERS: ALICE GREY

I NEED have no delicate scruples in commenting without reserve on the character and antecedents of this woman. It was always her desire to be famous; her struggles in prison to assume a position to which she considered herself entitled by her past notoriety were unremitting; her desire to call attention to the fact that she was Alice Grey—the celebrated Alice Grey, whom the papers spoke so much about—was evident from the first day she became a prisoner at Millbank.

Crime follows crime so constantly in this world, that I need make no apology for offering a few details of her earlier career. In the records of police news such lives as hers are soon forgotten by the casual reader. 'To

strive to be notorious by a series of crimes is a vain effort—worthy of the narrow minds that scheme for it.

Still I have no doubt Alice Grey is not quite forgotten, although the details of her earlier career, which found their way into most of the newspapers of 1856, have been consigned to general forgetfulness. As Alice Grey made some sensation in her day, and as the new development of her character in prison is worth a hasty sketch, some little recapitulation of her early career may not be out of place.

The earliest trace of her capacity for swindling and perjury occurred in 1849, in the capital of our sister isle—Alice Grey, under the assumed name of Armstrong, charging a man with the robbery of her purse. This malicious charge having fallen to the ground, Alice took to felony, and after suffering twice for that offence in Ireland, came to England, with a hope of better chances for her nefarious schemes.

Grey possessed considerable ingenuity in her tactics, and a great art—if there is any art in swindling after all—in assuming, with more than a common degree of truthfulness, those numerous characters which she personified. In Yorkshire and Derbyshire she was a clergyman's daughter, waiting at the numerous hotels for her father's arrival; then she was a Protestant escaping from Roman Catholic coercion; and at Canterbury she was a Roman Catholic lady, flying from a stern Calvinistic or Baptist father, who desired to immolate her at the shrine of paternal indignation for acting

according to the dictates of her conscience. Under these last afflicting circumstances she obtained from the Roman Catholic gentry several handsome contributions towards alleviating her pecuniary distress.

This last scheme becoming unprofitable, owing to the non-appearance of the indignant father, and the difficulty of some well-meaning persons in discovering her address, Alice Grey travelled through Scotland and England, assuming in most large cities or towns the character of a victim. Her trunks and purses were constantly being stolen from her during her journeys, and she left in a desolate place without a penny in her possession! To throw a truthful appearance over these statements, Grey never scrupled to charge some one with the robbery of her property, and to deliberately swear to the identity of the falsely accused person. Contributions from the benevolent flowed in to assist her in her difficulties; and so, under a series of false names, Grey worked her way from town to town, leaving behind her an innocent being to suffer for the crime, to the perpetration of which she had solemnly sworn.

In England alone twenty-nine innocent persons were charged by her with robbery, nine of whom were convicted on her testimony.

It may be remembered that she deliberately procured the conviction of two boys at Chester, who were afterwards released by order of the Home Secretary. Finally, Alice found herself domiciled in Stafford Gaol, to wait her trial at the Assizes.

At the Stafford Assizes, Grey succeeded in slipping, for a time, through the hands of the law. To the public amazement, the Grand Jury did not return a true bill against the prisoner; and after some skirmishing between her counsel and the counsel for the prosecution, she was once more liberated, to the delight of the people of Stafford, who saw in her only a victim to persecution.

At Birmingham, however, she was immediately arrested on a charge of perjury, and from Birmingham forwarded to Wolverhampton, to meet a second charge of as grave a nature there. Finally, the grasp of the law she had almost evaded became more firm, and Alice Grey, in the Spring Assizes of 1856, was sentenced to four years' penal servitude. Here the actions lost to public gaze—the true character stripped of the mask that had deceived society so long—may be taken up.

Although she was tried as Alice Grey, and was known at Millbank and Brixton Prisons by no other name, it was generally believed that the name was an *alias*. O'Brien, Tureau, Carter, Armstrong, Huggard, Atkinson, and Brazil were names that had each been adopted in turn—it was supposed at one period that her real name was Brazil, and that she was the wife of a soldier of that name; but at Millbank she spoke of being a single woman, and was extremely partial to the name by which she had become popularly known.

“I am the fascinating Alice Grey,” she was fond of remarking in a boastful manner—“you all have heard of the celebrated Alice Grey.”

She always alluded to herself by her Christian and surname with much egotistical satisfaction.

Alice was a woman of about seven-and-twenty years of age when she made her appearance at Millbank. She never owned to that number of years, and I believe that a less appears in the prison register. There is little dispute that she was a very handsome woman, and I have no doubt that her pretty face and soft voice were great assistants to her pitiable tales, and helped her in her guilty schemes.

Grey began her term of penal servitude at Millbank in a very quiet manner, showing, however, an inability and inaptitude for work, and a decided resolution to do no more than the law necessitated on any pretence whatever.

“Her white hands had never been used to it,” she said—“she had never earned a penny by them, and was not going to begin.”

As for Government—

“Government will never be the better, even for sewing a button on, from Alice Grey,” was her general remark; or—“I’m not quite such a fool as to work—no, no, miss, not half such a fool—thank you all the same.”

If remonstrated with, Alice Grey’s suavity of demeanour would vanish, and she would return some answers very abrupt and rude, winding up with an oath or an imprecation on the eyes and limbs of the remonstrant.

Throughout the whole term of her imprisonment

Grey sought to act the lady, looking down with contempt on the other prisoners, and refusing all association with them.

“They’re so rude and vulgar, and so much below me. The poor things hardly know their right hands from their lefts.”

To the matrons of the establishment she was equally as lofty—now and then, at Brixton, inclined, in a patronising way, to converse with her officer, or in a mild manner to reprove her, and threaten a report if she were not more respectful in her demeanour. With the lady superintendent she wished to exchange a word or two at times; but when making any appeal, or baffled in a purpose, Grey would lose all meekness of conduct, and use language such as only the worst of prison women would indulge in.

Her cool impudence, both at Millbank and Brixton, was characteristic to the last. It might happen that the superintendent, for some particular reason, wished to see Grey, and Grey would leave her cell in an indolent, lackadaisical manner, and dawdle on by the side of the matron towards the lady superintendent’s quarters.

“Do make a little more haste,” a matron said once to her under these circumstances, “the lady superintendent is waiting.”

“I shall take my time, miss,” she responded quietly; “I never hurried for anybody yet, and I really shall not begin for the sake of a lady superintendent. If the

lady superintendent wishes to see Alice Grey, she must wait till Alice Grey has a fitting time allowed to reach her!"

These little impertinent remarks are constantly being overlooked by prison matrons, or it would be raining reports all day long. And strange as it may appear, a matron very precise as to the rules, and who for any infraction thereof reports too frequently her prisoners, is looked at with a certain amount of disfavour by the authorities.

"How is it, Miss ——, you have so many complaints against your women?—they must be worse behaved, and therefore worse managed, than any other ward!" was once a superintendent's reproof to an over-energetic matron.

Alice Grey professed herself a Catholic in prison. Attendance in chapel was optional with her in consequence; and although she condescended now and then to accompany her fellow-prisoners, she was strict in her devotions to the priest. Grey was always anxious to deceive: she was not happy without preying on some one's sensibilities, and playing her old part of victim. When transferred to Brixton—where her behaviour, under less restraint, became more insolent and contemptuous—she suddenly took it into her head to write a long letter to the Roman Catholic priest, asking for a special visit on his part, as she was very miserable, and her heart was desperately troubled. If he would only come and reason with her, and talk with her a little!

At the time of Grey's notoriety, it was stated in more than one newspaper that her real name was Huggard, and that she was a native of Limerick; and although she had a great objection to be considered Irish, there was a certain look and manner in her indisputably appertaining to the sister isle.

"Lor' bless you, ma'am, she's Galway Irish," was a prisoner's criticism on her; "I've know'd lots of 'em."

Alice Grey, at Brixton, was for a little while in association with a Jewess, who was serving a long imprisonment for receiving stolen goods. The Jewess was a woman of education, and of staunch Israelitish principles, and Grey and she were accustomed to argue on religious topics and on their respective faiths.

And whether Grey was influenced by the arguments of the Jewess, or her natural bad temper asserted itself more violently at this period, certain it is that her habits underwent a further change, and that she became more wild and blasphemous and insolent.

One evening, she proceeded in a very methodical, business-like manner, to set her cell on fire, ripping up the bed, taking the coir therefrom, and setting fire to that and the sheets, which she hung out of the cell window for the amusement of those prisoners in the opposite wing who might be attracted by her eccentric proceedings. And the excitement of the Wing prisoners—Grey was an inmate of the Old Prison at the time—was aroused to such a pitch that it became the greatest difficulty to quiet them. Order was not restored till

messages were forwarded to the Old Prison of the conduct of one of its inmates, and Alice Grey was removed to the "dark," where she spent eight-and-twenty days for this grave breach of prison discipline.

Grey never returned to her regular habits after this long confinement, although she refused needlework, after the manner adopted from the first, and continued her resistance to rules in general. In the airing ground I have known her sit on the step of the laundry door, or on a chance stool, and refuse to budge an inch, or walk with the other women.

"No, Miss ——, I shall not walk this afternoon—I'm far from well, and far from strong, and no power can make me walk if I don't want to walk."

"But the rule is——"

"Oh! I don't want to hear anything about the rules—I shall not walk this afternoon, I assure you. You ought to know by this time that when the fascinating Alice Grey makes up her mind to a thing, she generally accomplishes it in one way or another."

Alice Grey so far played the invalid, or became under confinement so far a real invalid, as to be allowed to bring her stool into the airing ground when she pleased, and take up her station apart from the women's regular procession. This is a privilege conceded to all women who are too weak to stand a full hour's exercise—a privilege that I have been always inclined to think was abused by Alice Grey.

Prior to this, Grey had succeeded in taming a

sparrow, much after the principle of the prisoner mentioned in the early portion of this work, and to this little feathered stray she evinced all the affection that it was in her nature to bestow. For any matron or prisoner, during her stay at the prisons, Grey had never shown one spark of interest, much less love; but for this sparrow there was evinced the love and the fretful jealousy of a child.

And whether walking round the airing ground or sitting on her prison stool, there was the sparrow, on her finger or her shoulder, content with its position, and full of confidence in its protector. When Grey was in bed, and before the daylight lighted up the cell, the sparrow was accustomed to perch on her head and wait its mistress's attention, and she would sing and talk to it in a simple, artless manner, that was a striking contrast to her natural character.

Looking at her in those moments, one could scarcely believe her to be so crafty and dangerous a woman as her whole life's antecedents had proved.

She fretted about the sparrow for a little while when transferred to the Wing, but, recovering from her loss, took to religious argument with the Jewess, as before remarked, by way of distraction. And, in the Wing, Grey gradually degenerated, became more insolent and fierce, lost her badge, and was degraded to the Old Prison, where she served her time out, doing little or nothing in the way of prison service—making a feint to tidy her cell at times; and in fact

allowed to do, or to leave alone, almost what she liked.

To the last she expressed her confidence in being able to work her own way in the world again—never showing by a word her regret at the past sins she had committed, or the injuries to innocent persons of which she had been the cause.

Whether the old thoughts and plans for evil were busy in her brain when she left Brixton Prison, it is impossible to determine. As the name of Alice Grey has no more crossed our criminal records, let us at least think that her idea of “working her way” was by some new and honest method, in which her naturally keen judgment might assist her; and let us hope that she is following it up still, and is all the better woman for the effort.*

CHAPTER XXVII.

TROUBLESOME PRISONERS

I AM anxious in the present chapter to devote a little attention to those prisoners who may be classed under the general title of troublesome. Not very well-behaved,

* The reader will be glad to learn that Alice Grey was assisted to emigrate by the Prisoners' Aid Society on the 28th of March 1860. A letter has since been received from her, stating that she was in an excellent situation and contented with her new life. For this gratifying sequel to a strange story I am indebted to the Honorary Secretary of the Prisoners' Aid Society.

not decidedly ill-behaved, but oscillating between one and the other—gaining promotion, falling back again—winning a badge, losing it in a fit of passion or a freak of insubordination; women whose characters are so hard to guess, and whose movements are so little to be reckoned on, that the constant, careful watching of the matrons knows no diminution.

They are, for the most part, the worst class of prisoners—minor copies of Ball, or Towers, or others of whom I have attempted a separate description, interspersed with a better class of character; women whose sense of humour or love of aggravation asserts itself too prominently, and brings the jester into trouble.

With their minor escapades, singular whims and fancies—their schemes for association, or for a berth in the infirmary—their efforts to get up “sensation scenes,” and relieve the tediousness of regular discipline, I might fill the remainder of this volume.

In the first place, let me allude to one prisoner at Millbank, who caused no little trouble and vexation to the matrons and the inmates of her own ward by her persistence in a series of little tricks which kept the prison on the *qui vive*. The difficulty in restraining these humours of the prisoner arose from an inability to detect the culprit—one might have a suspicion of the real offender, but it was necessary to prove the fact, and catch the woman in the act.

The trick began in this manner. When all the women were locked up for the night, and the matron

of the ward was every instant expecting the night-officer, vent was suddenly given from an unknown quarter to a piercing shriek—a sharp, sudden shriek, that was over in a minute, and seemed to leave a stillness deeper than before, until the women began hammering against their doors, and calling to the matron in attendance.

“Miss ——, some one’s took ill!” was the general exclamation.

“Which woman is it?”

No one knew which woman or which cell it was. On further inquiry no one was discovered ill or ailing—no one acknowledged to the sudden outburst. The subject was dropped—the matron gave a general remonstrance on the impropriety of the act—and the night-officer came on duty, and was requested to keep a sharp look-out and see if it were possible to discover the offender. But all remained still for the rest of the night, and the subject within the next four-and-twenty hours was almost forgotten. However, at about the same time next night, and when the women were composing themselves for good—several of them were already in their beds and asleep—the same sharp, sudden cry rang out in the wards.

Renewed inquiries, careful investigation and cross-examination, and no satisfactory result obtained—the perpetrator of the act still wrapped in mystery, prison matrons and prisoners both equally puzzled.

The success of this trick appeared to warrant a

second edition that night; a new feature of annoyance to prison matrons had been introduced, which worked well, and it became necessary to keep the officers stirring. Consequently, in the middle of the night, just as the night-officer had left the ward and was proceeding to another part of the prison, utterance was given to the most awful and heart-piercing shriek that had ever rung in those dismal corridors.

This was too much for the patience of women never very patient at the best of times. They turned out of their beds and began shaking their doors with rage.

"Miss ——, just find out what fool that is who's waking us up with her nonsense," shouted one.

"I wish I only knew!" vociferated another.

"Ain't we hardly worked enough in the day, that we mustn't rest at night?" demanded a third woman.

"If she comes that caper agin, I'll keep you stirring, for I'll make a smash of it, blest if I don't!" threatened a fourth.

A fifth was cruelly sceptical as to whether it was a prisoner at all, and not a bit of spite of the officer on duty; whilst a sixth clamoured for association, because she was sure it was the devil coming! The night-officer used her best exertions to discover the culprit, but in a full ward discovery was difficult, and the result was as fruitless as anticipated. As persistence in these sudden shrieks was calculated to subvert all discipline in that particular ward, it became necessary to quietly put an extra matron on the

watch—a precaution which might have been attended with satisfactory results, if the shrieking had not ceased as suddenly as it had begun.

A few days' extra attention, and then the matter dropped, the watching ceased, and—the shrieking began again! The same inquiries were made, again the same result, and again the extra vigilance, which happened to be always exercised at the wrong time, and invariably in the wrong place.

This little variation of duties continued for some time, despite several plans to discover the delinquent, until one evening the matron made a feint of passing down the ward as usual, closed the door at the end somewhat demonstratively, and then noiselessly glided back to a position near the cells of one or two prisoners under suspicion. After waiting there with suspended breath for a while, she was rewarded by the sharp, sudden cry of a prisoner in the next cell but one to where she stood.

“Oh! it's you, is it!” was the exclamation, as she looked through the inspection. “Well, what have you to say for perpetrating so silly a trick?”

“*Me!*”

“Yes; you don't wish to deny it, now I have found you out?”

“Well, miss—you see, it was only a little bit of fun of mine!”

But the fun of hers was reported to the superintendent, and atoned for by due penance; and the

prison matrons have always considered it a great blessing that this unseasonable pleasantry did not become fashionable amongst a class famous for its mimicry of most things.

Mention has already been made in these pages of M'Williams, as partner in the wholesale destruction of glass, with Nicholas, at Brixton Prison—a woman so famous for breaking out, and all defiance of prison rules, that in the Director's book of characters there is scored against her name "*Incorrigible.*" And although M'Williams has had superiors—if there be any superiority in the art of mischief—she deserves the credit that appertains to such objectionable proceedings for her unceasing schemes to harass and confuse all in authority above her.

On being given a new cell broom one day, M'Williams was heard a few minutes afterwards shrieking with laughter in her cell.

"What's the matter, M'Williams?"

"Nothing particular, ma'am—only—oh! dear, it does look so funny!—I have been cutting the broom's hair. It's much too long, miss, according to the rules."

And, sure enough, M'Williams had cut every hair of the broom short to the wooden stump, and destroyed its sweeping capabilities for ever. Punished for this freak, the next act of irregularity exhibited by this prisoner was to walk to chapel with bare feet, an act unobserved by the matron in attendance, until the service was half completed, and M'Williams with cool

impudence was thrusting out her bare feet and legs from her dress, to the intense amusement of her fellow-prisoners.

To prisoners' tricks at school, I shall presently refer in my chapter on the prison schoolroom; and concerning those fancies which are not tricks, and give but little extra trouble to the matron, I have also a word or two to say in a befitting place. Of many characteristic acts much mention has been made, and is still to be made in those special chapters devoted to the purpose; it is needless to add that I do not seek to enumerate all the petty schemes which are constantly being formed by those women who keep to penal wards and refractory cells, and have no ambition for a badge.

The schemes to obtain a place in the infirmary are unceasing. Amongst them are many instances of self-mutilation, personal damage, and wanton destruction of health, which appear to be regarded as nothing in the balance with a few privileges and a higher scale of diet; and whether the illness be natural, or forced by the woman on herself, there is no keeping her from the infirmary ward, if she be resolved upon obtaining a place there. A woman will coolly pound a piece of glass to powder, and bring on internal hæmorrhage, nay, often bring herself to the dark threshold of death's door, for the mere sake of the change. Bad hands, and arms, and feet will be studiously contrived by means of scissors, thimble, a halfpenny fastened to a wound; madness will be feigned, stay-laces will be

twisted round the neck till respiration almost ceases; women more desperate still will run the risk of hanging themselves, in the hope of being cut down in time and taken to the infirmary.

The hanging process betrays much ingenuity as well as moral perversity, and is generally managed in this fashion by women who desire a little change. The button of the "inspection," or the iron work of the ventilator above the door, is generally chosen; to make a better case of it, the ventilator is selected by women of more nerve. Having procured a piece of list, or string, or taken the rope from her bed—there is no keeping every implement of self-destruction from a woman—the prisoner stands on her pail or stool, fastens the end of her string to the ventilator, puts her head into a running noose, and then gives a kick to her pail, which sends the water streaming underneath the door over the flag-stones of the ward. The appearance of the water suggests something unusual to the matron on duty—the door is attempted to be opened—a heavy swinging substance, to the matron's horror, is felt inside the door; extra assistance is called, the woman is cut down, and the doctor is hastily sent for. Every effort is used to restore the woman to consciousness, and the final result is association or the infirmary, according to the extent of injury committed. Many awkward mistakes have followed these desperate means—many errors of judgment have nearly ended in a fate unbargained for. Eliza Burchall, a prisoner of Brixton

Prison, concocted a scheme of this character with a second prisoner, who was to discover her hanging at a stated time on coming out of chapel, when she was accidentally to take a matron to Burchall's cell, on an excuse of articles left there during association. Burchall hearing footsteps approaching a few minutes before the appointed time, leaped off as arranged, and the footsteps *passed the door, and went on down the ward.* Her confederate, some three minutes afterwards, arrived in charge of the matron who was to open Burchall's cell and demand the missing property; and Burchall, to all appearances dead, was discovered hanging by the neck. In this instance, a return to life was despaired of—the long period she had been suspended, the rigid limbs, the swollen, livid features, seemed all evidences that playing at death had become death in earnest; and it was only by the unceasing exertions of the surgeon—and a more earnest or skilful doctor did not exist than Mr. Rendle of Brixton Prison—that the rash woman was brought back from the very brink of eternity, after remaining unconscious for three-and-forty hours.

Hanging on a less elaborate principle is adopted by more nervous women; tying a stay-lace round the neck, till the eyes nearly drop out of the head, and then waiting patiently for the arrival of the next comer, is quite a fashionable amusement, and, the reason considered for the act, answers tolerably well.

Tricks are played by prisoners often without an osten-

sible object. I have a remembrance of one woman named Jarvis, at Millbank, whose efforts to place her head in remarkable positions caused great embarrassment to the officers in charge. Wherever there was space to squeeze a head, this woman's soon found its way, and there it would remain a fixture for hours, although its removal was generally at the option of the prisoner. In each of the refractory cell doors there was a small trap, used for passing the food to the prisoners, and through this aperture would the woman's head be thrust, with a silly, defiant expression of countenance.

It was a ludicrous part of a matron's duty to stand in the ward arguing with this woman, and begging her to take her head in; all her expostulations eliciting, by way of reply, only an idiotic stare. Endeavouring to open the door might have led to the dislocation of the prisoner's neck, and only an urgent remonstrance could be made. Jarvis, or "Crying Jarvis," as she was termed by the prisoners, was considered to be a little weak in intellect, and certainly this extraordinary feat does not warrant me in estimating her as sane. The extra duty she entailed on her officer may be readily imagined, when medical orders were issued that the woman was not to be left with her head in that position, as, if her feet were to give way beneath her, death would infallibly ensue.

The guards were accustomed to be called in to Jarvis's head at all hours of the day and night, and efforts were

made to gently force it through the aperture again ; if successful, the trap was immediately closed ; if unsuccessful, a matron sat down to keep watch on this aggravating head.

Strict orders were given not to open the trap of Jarvis's door ; but the force of habit would lead the matron, almost unconsciously, to unfasten it, when, as quick as a Jack-in-the-box, and almost on the same principle, Jarvis's head would immediately appear.

Tears of bitter repentance over her treacherous memory would the matron shed, as the head refused to be withdrawn, and the watching of it became once more an extra prison duty. If Jarvis were more than usually troublesome or irritable, and the physical force used was successful in removing her head from its peculiar position, she would fling herself on her back, and commence a violent kicking on the floor with her heels, that would last for twenty-four hours without an instant's cessation.

Jarvis's head, and even Jarvis's heels, were always getting into extraordinary positions, however close the watch and careful the actions of the matron in attendance ; and the name of Crying Jarvis, to any of the old staff of either Millbank or Brixton Prison, would be followed by a fervent prayer that that eccentric woman might never meet with penal servitude again.

Returning to the old subject of schemes for obtaining admission to the infirmary, pricking the gums with a needle may be mentioned as a common practice

—the prisoner fears “she’s bust a wessel, because the blood keeps coming up in her mouth so.” And soap pills for sham fits and frothings at the mouth are as much in request at our Government prisons as amongst those street impostors who horrify a London audience.

There are women also who will stretch themselves out awfully “stiff and stark” in their beds, and so well assume the appearance of death, as to deceive the matron in charge, who, finding the prisoner has not responded to her call, enters the cell to see if anything has happened.

In some cases the doctor is sent for. If the woman is known to be an old offender, a pint of water is suddenly dashed into her face, when, as a rule, she will leap up in bed and utter a torrent of oaths at the indignity.

In one instance, where a woman stoutly insisted upon being dead, notwithstanding all natural appearances to the contrary, another prisoner who chanced to be in attendance hit upon the happy idea of thrusting her finger-nail between the nail and the flesh of the apparently deceased, when the woman bounced up, shook her clenched fist at her torturer, and yelled forth, “O Sal, you are a —— brute !”

Another of the prisoners at Millbank possessed such a peculiar and unusual capacity for self-inflation, as to deceive for some time even the medical attendant, who imagined that she was suffering from some natural malady. She would expand herself to an astounding degree, her size becoming greater every instant, and

alarming all her watchers. Removal to the infirmary often became necessary, where in time she would recover—sit up for a few days—take to her bed once more, and then begin again gradually to expand. Doubt of the genuineness of this woman's affliction having at last suggested itself to the medical attendant, from some suspicious gasps that seemed indulged in for the sole purpose of taking in more atmospheric element, chloroform was suddenly administered, with an effect in every respect surprising. The inflation disappeared when the woman's powers of inhaling became temporarily suspended, and the deception was at last clearly traceable to the right cause. This prisoner's marvellous powers of expansion were, notwithstanding the discovery, still practised with more or less success during her stay in prison. A trick, or not a trick, it exhausted her strength to that extent that infirmary treatment and diet could not be refused her.

It is often very difficult to distinguish between real and fancied infirmities, if the woman be clever at deception. There are some instances in which matrons, and even surgeons, have been puzzled to the last.

A case recurs to me of a woman at Brixton Prison; a poor, weakly creature, whose infirmities became apparently so great that for some years she spent the greater part of her time in her bed. At times she would make an effort to busy herself about her cell, or walk as far as the airing ground moaning feebly to herself, and doubling one of her legs under her with a very characteristic

limp. So intense were apparently her sufferings, that when she finally kept her bed for six or seven months—some who tell this story assert that she spent the last twelve months in bed—it was mercifully resolved to commute her sentence by two years, in consideration of her great infirmities.

And whether she were an impostor or not, certain it is that the day after the news was received she suddenly reappeared in the prison, tidying and dusting her cell, and with no signs left of her excruciating limp. She was considered an impostor for the time, although many attributed the temporary disappearance of her malady to the reaction of the nerves on the receipt of such good news as two years less of prison service.

At all events, the bodily prostration and the limp came back again before the day was out, which was consistent policy if she were an impostor, and a curious instance of the effect of sudden good news if she were not. Of her behaviour out of prison nothing is known. My own opinion concerning her is, that there was a great deal of deception allied to natural weakness, and that with one little variation from her *rôle*, she played her part with a skill far beyond the average.

One of the greatest tricks in prison life was perpetrated some years since by two women at Millbank. I say the greatest, not that there was much ingenuity or even daring in the act, but that the excitement amongst prison officers was greater than at any other time which can be called to memory.

The roof of the building then used as a laundry ran under the windows of the prisoners' cells, and from these windows a woman named Maxwell and another contrived to remove all impediments in their way, and squeeze themselves through to the roof of the laundry, where they were shortly afterwards discovered by the guards coolly promenading.

Alarm was by this time given from the interior that two women were missing from their cells, and the guards made their appearance round the laundry to prevent all attempt at further descent. The women, who had no intention of escaping, amused themselves with deriding the officials below, feigning to make leaps from the roof into the airing yard beneath, and executing little comic dances of defiance.

But an end was put to this divergence from the ordinary routine by ladders being brought to the laundry, and a simultaneous rush made upon them by two or three guards. The women offered no resistance, although they were both desperate characters—a scuffle on the roof of a house, with the prospect of an unceremonious dash into the yard beneath, not being to their taste. They accepted their handcuffs without a murmur, and went down the ladders and off to the “dark” in an exultant mood: it had been a great change for them, and they had enjoyed it very much!

Perhaps as great a piece of impudence was perpetrated at a later date by another prisoner, who was a woman of no very great muscular power to look at—in

fact, one whose general appearance was altogether deceptive. She was of the incorrigible order, setting all rules at defiance, and as partial to "breakings-out" as the worst of her contemporaries.

The principal feat for which she was celebrated at Millbank was that of suddenly rushing at a guard, six feet in height, whom special business had brought for an instant to the women's side of the prison, fling her arms round his capacious waist, lift him bodily from the ground, and run with him a distance of thirty or forty yards, amidst a roar of laughter from the women, and the attempt of the matrons in attendance to appear preternaturally solemn and shocked. The astonishment, suppressed rage, and discomfiture of the big warder would have afforded a study for George Cruikshank in his best days—never was the dignity of office more suddenly outraged and transformed to burlesque.

And burlesque will here and there start forth in the most unlikely places, and even prison walls will ring with laughter sometimes.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

PRISON CHARACTERS: MARIA COPES

A PUBLISHED report of the Directors of Convict Prisons once directed attention to a prisoner at Millbank, whose conduct was so extraordinary and outrageous, as to be

more that of a wild beast than a reflecting, rational human being. Even in the annals of prison life she stands an anomaly, her actions having been so far removed from those of other prisoners as to render her worthy of special mention in a Parliamentary paper.

The woman mentioned in that report, and who forms the subject of the present sketch, was Maria Copes, who was still serving out her time, and oscillating between the prisons of Millbank and Brixton, when my informant left Government service. (It is fair to add, however, that Copes was then making, for the first time, some little effort to turn over a new leaf, and had been several months without incurring a report.)

Copes, it may be premised, was a giantess in appearance, powerfully made, with a pair of broad shoulders and muscular arms worthy of a member of the pugilistic profession. A woman with no common sense, devoid of all common feeling even for her own sufferings, and of all reflection on the punishments that must follow her outbreaks; dark cells, handcuffs, and strait waistcoats had all no terrors for her. It is to this woman that I indirectly alluded in my sketch of Ball, as Ball's superior in the art of aggravation and resistance. Skilful with her hands, her feet, her teeth, and possessed of extraordinary strength, it may be imagined that Copes was no easy subject to deal with in her evil hours. For instance, it might happen that on some day she would suddenly refuse to take an airing, saying—

“There's no occasion why I should take air—what's

the good of air to me? Just be off, and leave me alone, while I'm quiet."

If this hint were not immediately attended to, she would scream like a hyena, dash at her cell door, and shake it with a force that in very violent paroxysms would perhaps leave it in her hands.

Breaking furniture, smashing glass, tearing blankets and rug after the old prison fashion, were mere trifles to Copes; the table was reduced to firewood in an instant, gas-pipes were torn down, the sides of tin cans were flattened together, and a greater number of men were always required to force her into a refractory cell than had ever been engaged on the same duties since Millbank Prison scowled across the water at the Vauxhall wharves.

Getting Copes into a refractory or dark cell was no easy matter; getting her, as soon as possible, out of those quarters, became another duty to be immediately attended to. When placed in the "dark," it was found that she had a partiality to leaping from one side of the cell to the other, taking "headers," as it were, against the opposite wall; or else assuming a crouching position in the corner, she would curl her arms round her knees, and commence a series of violent swinging motions that brought her head rapidly against the wall, with a sickening series of cracks that would have ended in concussion of the brain with any other prisoner. If not thus agreeably occupied, she would wrench up the flooring of "the darks," and batter away with the

planks at the door, till the whole prison seemed coming down. It became soon generally understood that Copes was too violent even for "darks" and "refractories;" canvas jackets were of little use, for she ripped them up and burst them asunder as though they had been prison sheeting; and handcuffs she broke or bit away from her wrists, and, failing that, tried to dash her brains out with them.

These extraordinary paroxysms of passion would last for days, and defeat all efforts to reduce them by restraint; the power to injure herself it was difficult to deprive her of, and she was more insensible to the pain she inflicted than were those compelled to be the witnesses of her self-torture. It became necessary to confine her in the padded cell, a room generally reserved for mad prisoners, the walls of which were thickly padded to within a few inches of the ceiling. Here she would climb about like a cat, and often be found wriggling slowly round the room several feet above the heads of her observers. She was as supple and as agile as a panther, and possessed all the strength of that animal.

Copes finished her feats in the padded room by tearing down with her hands and teeth all the strongly fixed canvas, supports, and stuffing, and piling up the ground with the *débris*. I believe this was the first time that ever the feat was accomplished, and the strength and ingenuity by which she succeeded in the attempt must have verged on the superhuman.

She became very vain of this last exploit—which she repeated several times—and used to boast of it to her fellow-prisoners, who were compelled after that to sit up with her night and day, for fear of ~~the~~ ~~har~~ she might perpetrate on herself.

Tightly secured in canvas jackets of an extra thickness, it became necessary to feed Copes with a spoon—a process which she objected to strongly, and for which she showed her contempt in a manner at once novel and characteristic. She would stand very quietly and receive a spoonful of her gruel, then give a cat-like run up the prison wall, blow the food from her mouth through the window, spring down again with pantomimic celerity, and place herself in position for the next modicum of gruel, to be served in the same way, until the whole was disposed of. If the women in association with her were withdrawn for a few minutes, she would often be found on their return divested of the canvas jacket, and with the ceiling of her cell torn down and covering the floor!

A special consultation between the resident surgeon, Dr. Guy, the medical superintendent—the worthy, kind, and clever successor to the late lamented Dr. Baly—and Dr. Forbes Winslow, resulted in the conviction that Copes was of perfectly sound mind—indulging in the mere eccentricities, I may add, of a woman naturally playful!

After her fits of insubordination Copes was accustomed to sober down a little, to do her work regu-

larly, and to behave like the other prisoners. She was always carefully watched, however,—matrons were warned of her, and prisoners cautioned not to cross her; but she took offence at so many little trifles, and was always so full of whims and fancies in herself, that studying Copes was of very little use.

Strangely enough, though the most violent woman in prison service, she never indulged in the foul, abominable language common to prisoners in their paroxysms.

Copes sobering down somewhat, endeavours were made to induce her to take exercise, and by dint of much coaxing she one afternoon proceeded, like a sulky elephant, into the airing ground of Millbank Prison. Here affairs seemed progressing in a satisfactory manner, until, becoming tired of the monotony, and anxious to create a little diversion, she squatted down in a corner of the yard, and proceeded to rock herself backwards and forwards, in much the same style as she was accustomed to in the "darks," bringing her hard skull with violence against the bricks with every oscillation.

Some of the women shrieked, and ran to stop her—Copes broke into one of her old frenzies—a number of guards arrived to the rescue, and she was borne away to her old refractory quarters.

"I told you I wasn't going to walk, and that I didn't like air," she grumbled, by way of explanation for her outbreak, a few days afterwards.

Copes in due time was sent on to Brixton, where the new rules and new faces brought on for a while the old irritable fits, until she "took a turn," as it were and gave evidence of sobering down.

Hence she proceeded calmly and methodically in the regular routine, and every one was thinking how nicely Copes was going on, and how wonderfully she had altered for the better. Whether a change was yet to come "o'er the spirit of her dream," and she was again to make havoc with prison property and render nugatory all methods yet adopted for the regulation and order of female convict establishments, it was impossible to guess.*

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE PRISON SCHOOL

GOVERNMENT makes a wise effort to afford our unruly children some little idea of right, in contradistinction to the lessons conned in the darker school where there are ever pupils apt at ill instruction.

In justice to my subject, I must say, that the schooling system is far from a perfect one—does not work well, even irritates the women. Perhaps it would be hard for most of us to sit down late in life to learn school lessons; to these women who have known no

* Maria Copes is long since free. Her conduct, on the whole, at Brixton Prison was just "passable."

lessons in their childhood, and whose minds are set to ignorance, the prison school is almost unendurable.

I cannot think that so much attention has been given to the schools as the subject requires. The machinery to do good is existent; but it appears to me that it is not fairly worked. *There is no incentive to learn*, and the women sit down to their lessons with more doggedness and moroseness than they exhibit when they turn to their daily labour.

“What’s the good of my learning at this time of life?” one woman will say. Another will exclaim, “I’d rather have six months—nine months—longer sentence than this sort of work. It’s awful hard!”

They sit at their desks, a number of unruly children, more ignorant and unteachable than any child can possibly be, growling discontent over their lessons, and seeking to evade them. Over such a grisly array of pupils, the two school-mistresses in attendance possess little, if any, power.

At Millbank the instruction was cellular. Years since, some new arrangements were made at that prison, and followed up with a little more success, although I can scarcely credit the fact that the number of those who were still unable to write their own letters when transferred to Brixton was comparatively few. In fact, the reports of the chaplains at Brixton and Fulham, to which these women were drafted, alleged almost the reverse. “The educational state of the prisoners who have been received during the year has

not been encouraging," asserted the Rev. J. Moran, of Brixton Prison. The following return of school duties which were held at Millbank Prison, I extract from an old report. The routine still is very much the same:—

“School is held in each ward twice a-week, for an hour and a half at a time. The number of school-mistresses assigned to a ward is four, and as a ward contains on an average about twenty-eight prisoners, each teacher has thus seven prisoners to instruct, to each of whom (for they are taught individually in their cells) the time permits her to give a lesson of about thirteen minutes’ duration on the average. During the school hour all work is suspended. On the commencement of school the prisoners are set to write, and while they are thus employed the teachers are passing from cell to cell, giving to each, in turn, a short reading lesson, and pointing out any defects in the writings that need correction. When the teacher leaves, the prisoner resumes her writing, if not already finished, or, if she has finished her writing, goes over by herself the lesson just received. Under the former arrangement each school-mistress had a certain number of wards assigned to her, each of which she visited twice in the week, teaching in the ward for half a day each time, during which the prisoners were at liberty to lay aside their work in order to make preparations for the school-mistress. It was found, however, that, except in the case of some few anxious to improve themselves, no preparation was made, and that beyond the few minutes’

actual instruction by the school-mistress, nothing was done by the prisoners for themselves. Under these circumstances their progress could not be satisfactory. Another defect of the old arrangement was, that it admitted of little or no supervision of the teaching on the part of the chaplain. A remedy is found for this in the present plan, which, by bringing the teachers together in a single ward at a time, rather than distributing them singly throughout several wards, enables the chaplains to superintend their work, and also better to stimulate and encourage the prisoners by occasionally himself testing their progress."

The prison school-room at Brixton was a large room built out from that part of the building termed the Old Prison, and generally known by the name of Number I. The women were taught once a-week in classes of fifty at a time; the Wing women generally of a morning, from ten till half-past twelve; the Old Prison women, and consequently the worst behaved, of an afternoon, and for a period of time somewhat less than women of the second or first class.* On Saturdays there was a school held for the laundry wards, on which day another room was opened, and a hundred women were taught at once, by four school-mistresses. Two school-mistresses composed the staff, but the ladies holding the positions of librarian's and chaplain's clerk at Brixton assumed for the time a position as preceptors. It must be under-

* The slight alteration of teaching the women in smaller classes was afterwards tried with satisfactory results.

stood that everybody was compelled to attend school, with the exception of sick prisoners, or prisoners confined in the refractory cells for insubordination. Lady prisoners, whose education may be in advance of the school-mistress's, sat side by side with the woman who stumbled over a word of one syllable, or could not read at all, and who sat glowering at her book, inwardly cursing its contents.

The two school-mistresses sat in the centre of the room, having the women on three sides of them. Each school-mistress attended to five-and-twenty women, whilst facing the fifty prisoners was the matron, whose duty it was to keep a careful watch, and allow no surreptitious whispering. And it was singular the little respect that was shown to the two school-mistresses, and the power that was possessed by the matron over that ward of fifty prisoners. If the matron glanced aside, whispering began at once, and no threats or warning of the school-mistresses had any effect upon their pupils.

The school-mistress used to appeal to the matron on duty if there was too much talking, and the matron would call to order and reprove the unruly. Bible reading in classes was adopted by those who had a fair knowledge of their letters, and a strange gabble of sounds it was proceeding from these women. There was, however, an objection to reading aloud amongst them, and it was only by the matron's continual remonstrance that the majority of the women could be

induced to read at all. Those who had yet their letters to learn had special lessons given them, and great was the difficulty to surmount the first barriers in the way of education. Women more ignorant and stupid than these prisoners it was impossible to conceive; teaching them became a hopeless task—the little progress made one week was entirely forgotten the next, and had to be re-learned, with the same stolidity of manners and vacuity of countenance. Teaching for two hours, or two hours and a half, once a-week, with no lesson to learn in the interim, was a burlesque of teaching with such indocile pupils.

Reading in Bible-class and a writing lesson constituted almost all the school duties required of the women. Originally copy-books were given to them, until the leaves began to disappear, and to be used for furtive correspondence; afterwards a single sheet of paper was laid before each woman, and collected at the end of school hours, the performance thereon being duly criticised.

At one period an attempt was made to teach the elementary rules of arithmetic—a variation which unfortunately proved a signal failure. It was the last feather on the camel's back, and the women would have nothing to do with such arduous mental exertion. To do them justice, they made the attempt; but the extraordinary answers that were returned to questions the most simple, and the shouts of laughter from the women at the desks at the blunders of those who had found courage

to respond, were subversive of good order, often of good temper. A scene like the subjoined was of common occurrence:—

“Attention, please. Twice two?”

“Four,” would be responded pretty generally.

“Twice three?”

Affairs would be growing difficult, and out of twenty-five women six or seven would venture to reply, “Six.”

“Twice four?”

Dead silence, to be suddenly broken by one voice crying out “Nine,” at which there would be a roar of laughter from the rest of the class.

“What are you laughing at, stupids?” a woman once passionately exclaimed; “I’ll fetch one of you a hit of the mouth in a minute, if you don’t stop grinning.”

“Jackson, I shall report you,” remonstrated the matron on the watch.

“I ain’t come here to be laughed at, miss, I can tell you!”

Jackson would probably subside, if the matron were a woman of tact and well acquainted with the humours of the prisoners.

Arithmetic proving a failure, teaching resolved itself again into Bible-class and writing-lesson, which I believe has continued in our prisons to this day, without any change from the wearisome monotony.*

* My observations on this head appear at variance with the list of school-books mentioned in the report. The following works, I perceive, are set down:—Class Reading Books, Nos. 4, 5, and 6; Adult Lesson Book; “History of England;” “Catechism of History of England;”

The Old Prison women were naturally more difficult to manage than the Wing women; and if there were a general mutiny in the school amongst the former, there would be little chance for the one matron and two school-mistresses against fifty furious prisoners.

The Old prisoners used to come to school with more reluctance than the Wing women; "lumping" themselves down on the forms and opening their Bibles with an impatient dab upon the desk.

Occasionally it happened that the prisoner would sit down in a corner and refuse to read or write, remaining there stolid and defiant during the whole time allotted to prisoners' education.

"I can't stand it, miss—it only drives me silly," a woman would exclaim, in reply to her matron's reproof; "I'll be quiet here. I shan't do any reading to-day—catch me at it!"

Another of the Old Prison women would suddenly leap to her feet with a stifled exclamation which might pass for a mild remonstrance or a muttered oath, and stride over her form indignantly.

"Miss ——, I want to go back to my cell."

"Wait till schooling is over, Jones."

"Catechism of Astronomy;" "Catechism of Geography;" "Catechism of Modern History;" "Stewart's Geography;" "First Book of Arithmetic;" "Spelling Book, superseded by Sullivan," &c. &c. Some of these works are on the shelves; others are not even alluded to. No body of female convicts could be made to receive lessons from one-tenth of them. With regard to the "First Book of Arithmetic," it may be as well to add that a sum is still occasionally worked on a large slate, at which the women gape and stare, but gather little information from.

The woman shook her head savagely.

“I’m sick of schooling. You’d better take me back to my cell—I shall only make a row here. Don’t say I haven’t given you warning.”

If the woman steadily persisted, for the sake of peace and quietness the matron allowed her to withdraw, accompanied her to her particular ward, and locked her up in her cell. On her return to the schoolroom, the prisoners would invariably be discovered talking at the top of their voices, deaf to the reproofs of the schoolmistresses, and stolidly oblivious of their presence. Quarrels had begun on the old subject of “palling in;” jealous mutterings echoed from one form to another; threats of punching each other’s heads, and scratching out each other’s eyes, were prolific, and it required all the matron’s power to subdue these angry waters, and cast oil upon them, before the tempest raged forth in earnest.

It was the matron’s most difficult task to keep these women subordinate to prison rules in school hours, and extra insubordination was considered the matron’s fault, and punished by a fine.

Instances have occurred of a refractory pupil suddenly losing all command of temper, and flinging her books unceremoniously at the head of a woman who has offered her an insult in the shape of a grimace or a laugh at her peculiar style of reading. It is needless to inform the reader that these stormy variations of temper spread like wild-fire, and offer temptations to follow a similar

example that it is difficult for unsettled natures to resist.

During the last half hour of "schooling," the women, weary of tuition, would begin to talk and whisper together; if not too loudly, the matron, as a general rule, allowed the little privilege of a gossip. But the ways of one matron were not those of another in the schoolroom—each had her own peculiar style of management, and according to the good sense and discretion of the officer, so was there more or less discipline in school hours.

A bad officer lost half the command over her women at these times—fifty unruly natures together in one room were hard to keep in a semblance of quiescence, when books were wearisome, and blots and splashes plentiful.

Occasionally the superintendent, the deputy, or the chaplain would enter, and a general rising of the inmates of the room take place—a few prisoners, if of a sullen turn, feigning not to notice the arrivals, until attention was directed to their breach of courtesy by the matron in attendance.

Superintendent, deputy, or chaplain having departed, after asking a few questions,—perhaps on the progress of the women,—the school subsided, and lessons were resumed.

Time for dismissal having arrived, the school-mistress rapped the table, and the women rose, whilst she uttered the prayer of dismissal used in our churches: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us all evermore.

Amen." In earlier times it was usual to substitute a verse of a hymn in lieu of this solemn petition,—that beautiful verse, commencing—

“Praise God, from whom all blessings flow.”

But the women, with little reverence in their natures, and glad of an opportunity of exercising their voices, gave vent to such vociferous bawling, and such sly wicked additions of their own to the verse, that it became necessary to discontinue singing, and to substitute the prayer already mentioned.

School over, the first twenty-five women, with as much delight as was ever evinced by a restless crowd of boys turning out of a village school to a breezy common, would start from their forms towards the door, the matron using her best endeavours to send them out with some semblance of order. The more artful of them, before this time, may have filled their thimbles with ink, intending to make off with a small modicum of that fluid, to be used in correspondence with a “pal” in some other portion of the prison.

This thimble the woman would carry in her hand to her cell, sometimes betraying herself by dropping the ink on the stones, or spilling it over her dress; and if ingenious enough to keep it concealed till dinner-time, would sink it in half her dinner loaf, and put by that half till tea-time.

“Not at all hungry to-day, miss,” was her excuse; “perhaps my appetite will come round by tea.”

And so for one meal the half loaf was allowed to remain, and this was no infraction of the prison rules.

The above is a fair sketch of prison schooling; very little is learned, and the school-mistress finds it uphill work to drill some seeds of learning into the heads of these ignorant, often brutal women. Still it is a step in the right direction, from which much good might be evolved if the requisite care were taken, and the requisite means to work good put into form and carried out.

CHAPTER XXX.

PRISON CHARACTERS: SARAH BAKER, MARY MAY, AND
THE JEWESS

IN Millbank and Brixton Prisons were, and are, many prisoners whose traits of character are worth preserving. They stand a little apart from the general body, and I should not be doing justice to my task were I to wholly pass them by. They are not characters very striking, neither is any remarkable incident connected with them, but there is sufficient interest attached to each to warrant an appearance in these pages.

I have no doubt that the story of Sarah Baker has long since been forgotten by newspaper readers, notwithstanding that much public sympathy was evinced for her at the time of trial.

Sarah Baker was tried for the murder of her infant,

at the Stafford Assizes, in July 1853. It may be remembered by a few that the case was a pitiable one, and the crime awful in its character. The old story of man's temptation and woman's fall, ending in the birth of a child, which she was totally unable to support. The circumstances were aggravated by the facts that her seducer had fled the country, in order to avoid the liability of supporting her child, and that at the end of a year he had returned and married another woman. Sarah Baker, the story runs, strove for a long while against the adverse current, in the hope of supporting herself and child, and, finally, becoming desperate, took the child to a deserted pit-shaft and threw it down. An attempt was made by her counsel to obtain her acquittal on the ground of insanity; but the jury found her guilty of murder, at the same time strongly recommending her to mercy, on account of the distressing nature of the case, and the morbid condition of mind under which she laboured when the deed was perpetrated. The jury's recommendation was forwarded to the proper quarter, and Sarah Baker's sentence of death was commuted to penal servitude for life.

Sarah Baker arrived at Millbank Prison a very young, delicate woman, took her place in her ward at coir picking very willingly, and soon became distinguished from the mass as an obedient, even cheerful prisoner. I am inclined to think that a great deal of public sympathy was wasted on this woman, and that for the crime itself, and its consequences, Baker felt little remorse. There

was a hardness, even a callousness, in her manner of alluding to the crime, that showed the heart had not been wrung much by the guilty act which had deprived her child of life.

“I was obliged to throw the little beggar over,” it is reported Baker said one day to a woman to whom she was detailing the incidents of the dark past; “it made such an awful row.”

Baker’s health, both at Millbank and Brixton, was variable. When out of the infirmary, she was a good servant, worked industriously, was civil to her matrons, and preserved a far more cheerful demeanour than the majority of the prisoners.

The past crime did not press heavily on her conscience, I have observed; but it is a remarkable fact that these serious acts seldom do. Women who are in for murder, more especially for the murder of their children, are, as a rule, the best behaved, the most light-hearted prisoners. I may add here that with all the prisoners the crime is of little account, and the sentence for it only a subject to be deplored. It is always a harsh sentence, or an unjust one.

“If old Judge ——, or that ——, had tried me instead of ——, I shouldn’t have had all this blessed time to serve!”

Mary May was a prisoner of a different stamp—a woman who served four years for petty larceny, and went back to the world—a young, fair-haired woman, a staunch Catholic, and, let me add, a saucy, quarrelsome

prisoner, who required considerable attention on the part of the matrons. She affected a supreme contempt for the other prisoners, albeit her own ignorance was something remarkable.

"I can't speak to 'em, miss," she would say confidentially; "they are such a set of rubbitch."

And when she *did* speak to them it was in answer to a taunt of some description, which elicited another taunt, and very often ended in blows being exchanged, and May and her antagonist taking their places in the "dark." If she were fortunate enough to obtain her badge, she very quickly lost it, and went back to her lower position and another "set of rubbitch."

To a certain extent she was a half-witted woman. In the airing ground, about once a fortnight, she would sidle up to the matron and ask, in a confidential whisper, if she might be permitted to speak a word. Permission granted, she would say—

"I want to know about my time, miss. Can you give me any idea as to the day, yourself, now?"

Mary May knew to the hour when her time would expire, but she was anxious so compare notes with some one also acquainted with her term of service. She was inclined to labour under a delusion that there was a mistake somewhere, which, being rectified, would lead to her liberty coming a little earlier than expected.

"I shall have a fortune before I am out, miss," she was in the habit of saying; "there's a little property

coming to me soon, with the blessing of God. Quite a snug little property, miss."

And one day, late in her time of servitude, she came with a radiant countenance across the airing yard.

"May I speak a word to you?"

"What is it, May?"

"I've come into my property—I had a letter this morning from my friends, telling me all about it."

"I'm very glad to hear it, May. You'll be a better and different woman now."

"Yes, miss, by the blessing of God. And may I beg the obleeping of another favour—have you heard anything about my time, miss?"

"Not lately."

"There's not likely to be any alteration, because I've come into my property, I suppose?"

"I am afraid not."

"Oh dear!" with a weary sigh, "I shall be very glad to get clear of all this rubbitch."

May returned to her place amongst the prisoners to muse over her property, and speculate as to its disposition in the good time lying beyond her prison life. And that she had been left some seventy or eighty pounds was quite correct. To such a woman it was a fortune, and was doubtless afterwards a means of keeping her from fresh temptation.

Mary May was a gross flatterer, too. The matrons were all looking "exceedingly handsome this morning. Lord bless their fine eyes, what lovely creatures they all were!"

“ Bless your handsome face—how charming you are looking this morning, Miss ——,” she said once to a matron at Millbank; “ there’s a kind of colour on your cheeks that just sets you off like. My dear, good soul,” with a sudden drop of her voice to a hasty whisper, “ have you got such a thing as a hair-pin to spare ? ”

Mary May was also a fortune-teller. Previous to her conviction, she had done a little business with credulous servant-maids and village girls by foretelling the future; and she was anxious to practise her art on the matrons, on terms very much reduced.

A hair-pin, a scrap of tallow candle for her hair—any little privilege that might be conceded without harm to the officer, and with advantage to herself.

“ My pretty lady, let me tell your fortune this morning,” she would say, with the true professional whine—“ there’s such a fortune waiting for you! Ah! and a young man with dark eyes too!—I dreamt of him last night, miss.”

But fortune-telling did not answer: the matron’s fortune was in locking and unlocking, keeping a strict watch on her prisoners, and rising one pound five a-year—Mary May’s news of a young man with dark eyes was not a very great temptation.

I believe she told the fortunes of one or two of the prisoners who found themselves in association with her; but they were fortunes unsatisfactory to her auditors, for mutterings invariably ensued—occasionally a downright quarrel.

"I can't help it, miss," May would say, when remonstrated with; "there's no agreeing with such rubbitch."

"You'll lose your badge, and go back to the Old Prison, I fear."

"I'm sorry for that, because you've been so very kind to me, and your handsome face has been like sunshine to me. Don't let the report be too stiff, miss, for your own Mary May's sake."

Mary May would be sometimes subject to fits of intense gloom after the priest's visit; and before his arrival even, she would go through strange self-imposed penances, that had to be reproved by the matrons in attendance, and now and then reported.

If she had been more than usually wicked in her own estimation, she would scratch her face in a horrible way, to conciliate the priest on his arrival—a facial disfigurement being in her idea an excellent moral set-off against iniquity.

"It serves me right, miss," she said once; "I deserve it all. Don't try to persuade me not to do it."

But these morbid fits were few and far between, and Mary May, as a rule, was a troublesome, coarsely flattering, vexatious woman.

The last character to which I shall direct attention in this chapter was a Jewess, whom I shall call Solomons: a woman of education, and even refinement, who served a long period of penal servitude for receiving stolen goods in a wholesale and business-like manner.

She was the Jewess already mentioned in this book as being for a time in association with Alice Grey, and holding with her lengthy arguments. Solomons was a quiet, thoughtful woman, with a horror of the other prisoners—a broad-faced Jewess, on whom the shame of incarceration seemed to tell somewhat.

Grave and reserved in her habits, yet civil and almost deferential to her matrons, she was a woman who made little complaint, and who, at first, was particular as to her food, and had the Hebrew objection to the Christian mode of cooking. In all Government prisons the religious feelings and the peculiarities of sect are studied, and efforts were made to soften a little the position in which Solomons was placed. A separate and special cooking was attempted for a little while, but interfered so much with official duties that it gradually fell into disuse; and as time went on, she appeared to conform more readily to the general rules respecting diet. She kept her fast-days, fish-days, &c., strictly to the last; and the officers not only threw no impediment in her way, but very kindly did their best to assist her.

Solomons' rich friends afforded a strange contrast to prison visitors in general. These Hebrew visitors were rather vain of their finery, it may be added, and anxious to make the most of it in the eyes of the officials. Solomons' husband, or Solomons' brother—the exact relationship I have forgotten—came on "visiting days" with unerring punctuality, dressed in the height of fashion, and with his fat sausage fingers glittering with

diamond rings ; and Solomons' lady friends, in their silks and satins of gorgeous hues, made the matrons' poor brown merino dresses look wofully shabby by contrast. Dressing in colours suitable to the place never suggested itself to these Hebrews ; but then they fry fish in sky-blue satin, a satirical writer has observed.

Solomons, when uneasy in her mind, was favoured by a special visit from the Rabbi, who went through the Jewish ceremonial expressly for her instruction and improvement. She was of a conciliatory disposition, I may add, and anxious to impress, by her past importance, the mind of the matron who had charge of her. There went a flying rumour through the prison that she had once been liberal with some gold, although it was difficult to guess how gold had found its way into her hands, and unfair to intimate a doubt that any matron was an instrument between the Jewess and her friends. The rumour only arose from a half-sovereign being found in the ward near Solomons' cell, or in the airing ground near Solomons herself. But rumours will steal into prisons, and cast their shadows over matrons who are faithful servants of the State. Such rumours an exemplary life is sure to live down in good time.

CHAPTER XXXI.

PRISONERS' FANCIES

OF prisoners' vagaries, of the tricks that lead them into trouble, of the desperate acts that stamp them penal class women,—of the insidious self-sacrifice, in the hope of reaching the infirmary, I have discoursed already at some length. In the present chapter I design to treat of the fairer side to prison life and character—to attempt the more pleasant task of proving that there are flashes of a better nature in many women serving out their time; and that amongst a few there are little whims, fancies, tastes, that tell very plainly of a thoughtful mind and an affectionate disposition.

Not that all prisoners' fancies are indications of a better nature. Some fancies ostensibly have no meaning, and are attempted by way of solace, or for that variation of employment which *is* a solace to not a few female convicts. Of this class I may as well speak in the first place.

Both at Millbank and Brixton there were a number of well-behaved, orderly women, who were conscious that smashing windows and destroying prison property were not the best methods of advancing in the good graces of the authorities; women who had self-command sufficient to resign themselves to the monotony of their lives, and do their work, and fulfil all prison duties with regularity and neatness. By

way of a relief, they had their little fancies to indulge in—harmless in themselves, and involving at the worst but the reservation of a few threads of divers colours, or little pieces of stuff from their general work, for uses of their own, to be presently explained—or else some vagaries with reference to their own ideas of cooking, also to be mentioned here.

The principal amusement of the good-conduct women appeared to be the making of innumerable tiny shoes and boots, constructed with exceeding neatness, and from a quantity of material the diversity of which was a puzzle to the officers. From innumerable bits of rag, of all shapes and colours, were these boots made ; by the more skilful women constructed with a grace of outline that rendered them worth preserving as specimens of prison skill. These little boots and shoes—generally lace-up ladies' boots—were carefully padded, closed at the top, and sewn together in pairs ; they were seldom more than an inch or an inch and a half in length, and were thus handy for concealment. They were often offered as little presents from the prisoner to the matron ; if they were seen in the cell, a matron of judgment would not provoke the woman by making an immediate seizure of them, although the rule of forfeiture was absolute. The prisoner, however, was generally ready with some appeal :—

“ Oh, give me these, Jones!—I should like to give these to my little niece ”—or sister.

And Jones brightened up with delight at once, and,

happy in having the power to confer a favour, was radiant with pleasure for a week together.

The construction of small rag dolls was another source of amusement that was against the rules, but in which the women would employ themselves during the overtime after tea. In the making of these dolls they were not quite so skilful; materials being limited, and their knowledge of anatomy—even the anatomy of dolls—being imperfect to the last degree. These little dolls had extraordinarily small waists and long crane-like necks; and the outline of their features was stitched in coloured thread on the white nob that represented the head. Sometimes the dolls were strictly prison dolls, with the regulation dress, apron, and cap complete, and were representatives or caricatures of “pals” in other wings. If a scrap of silk could be filched from the dressmaking women, a lady was attempted; now and then it was a servant, standing on a flat bit of card, with a broom in her hand—the handle a splinter of the table perhaps, and the bristles abstracted from the cell broom. If the doll were intended as a present, great care was taken with the capillary decorations, and from the worker’s own head would be shorn sufficient hair to give effect to the *tout ensemble*. But they were ugly specimens of art at the best, and the immense mouth that was marked in red cotton, under the long black line significant of the nose, gave a gaol-bird look to the whole of them which a disinterested observer was more quick to perceive than those who had

been working under difficulties, and in fear of detection, for a week at least.

There was one woman with a taste for juggling, who made a series of small balls from "ravellings" of her work, and who would practice in her cell the art of flinging these balls from one hand to the other, with a success at which any professional mountebank might have gnashed his teeth with envy.

Crochet was often practised, *sub rosa*, by the prisoners. A woman would begin slowly to accumulate a store of prison cotton for the purpose, concealing it in the interior of her bed, perhaps, until time allowed her an opportunity of commencing—or else beginning at once, and concealing her work each day. (Despite the cell being searched once a-week, the woman will often contrive to evade detection of her hidden store.) A crochet-hook was formed out of a needle or hair-pin, and a prisoner skilful in the art would turn out a neat and perfect specimen of work. If she were attached to her matron, which was very often the case, the woman would suddenly thrust it into her hands when completed.

"What's this for?" might be the exclamation.

"It's for you," was the gruff response.

"But I must not take it—it's against the rules."

"Burn it, then."

"But this is prison cotton—I ought to report you."

"Do, if you like," muttered the woman.

It was not reported in nine cases out of ten—the antimacassar or the D'Oyley was quietly destroyed, and

the case, with all its extenuating circumstances, communicated to the principal matron, or consigned to oblivion, as judgment might dictate.

And a few of these prisoners' efforts to evince their affection to the matron in charge were very embarrassing to the officer. It was very hard to report a woman for working weeks or months to make some little present on the officer's birthday—the date of which she had managed artfully to elicit—but it was a dangerous secret for the matron to keep, and might peril her position. And these women were not to be trusted, notwithstanding all their manifestations of affection; in the event of a break-out, they would seek to bring the officer into trouble even respecting the presents received from themselves.

Some matrons, new to the service, were foolish enough to receive these little offerings, and generally lived to repent the unwise act. Still, there were prisoners very faithful, who never swerved from their first fancy, and who would almost die to serve their officer—they were exceptions to the general rule.

Pin-cushions, of a diminutive form and odd ingenious shapes, women will make also; there was no motive for their construction; it was hard to find a recipient for them—they were readily discovered in a cell, and they entailed much extra work; yet they continued to be made with as much zeal as if an extra gratuity depended upon the rapidity with which they were finished off.

One woman at Brixton Prison constructed a fancy box from some old cards, fastened them neatly together, and embroidered every side with texts from Scripture in red and blue letters. This, as a model of prison skill under difficulties, I have reason to believe, was not destroyed.

In the airing ground at Brixton, where there were a few flowers growing at times—flowers of a perennial kind, such as white alysson and Michaelmas daisies—one of them would be suddenly snatched and hidden. This was an offence for which the woman was reprovèd, if not reported, in the event of discovery; and as the prisoners would occasionally quarrel for possession of the flower before the time of exercise was over, discovery generally ensued.

There is a remembrance of a matron's looking through the "inspection" of a cell some years ago, and perceiving a prisoner, with her elbows on the table, staring at a common daisy, which she had plucked from the central patch of grass during her rounds; she was one of those rude, repulsive, but not wholly bad prisoners, from whom no display of sentiment was anticipated. Yet the wistful look of that woman at her stolen prize was a gleam of as true sentiment as ever breathed in a poet's lines. A painter might have made much of her position, and a philosopher might have moralised concerning it—for the woman wept at last, dropped her head down on the table between her linked hands, and shed her bitter tears silently and noiselessly. The prison daisy must

have spoken of the old, innocent times—of the fields she crossed once with old friends—perhaps of daisies like unto that before her, which were growing on a mother's grave.

Six months afterwards that flower was discovered pressed between the leaves of her Bible—a little treasure no one would have had the heart to take away, had there been any laws of confiscation concerning daisies in “the books.”

Prisoners with unpoetical fancies, or unindustrious fancies, had peculiar whims concerning their food, and ideas for cooking such food in an original and felonious manner. These were the dainty prisoners; to whom the regular order of diet was not congenial, and who risked their badges in cooking for themselves.

A woman, for instance, would be seized with a fancy to make a cake, and proceed in the following manner. She would conceal her dinner loaf, and after dinner soak her bread in the water which was furnished three times a day to each cell. The bread, moistened sufficiently, was mixed with the fat which had been previously skimmed from her dinner; the whole was kneaded into some semblance of a cake, placed in a pan or a “pint,” and, when the gas was lighted, held over the flame until the baking was completed. When cans and “pints” were not to be had, a woman would hold the cake in her fingers over the gas, changing it from one hand to another, and blowing and licking her fingers when the suffering became too intense.

Finally, if the cake were baked to the satisfaction of the composer, and with no discovery on the part of the officer of the ward, it was consumed in secret, a portion perhaps being reserved for transmission to the distant pal, by the readiest means that might be available in the morning.

As a rule, however, discovery took place—for the perfume of burnt cake, and of the scorched bottom of “pints,” would be wafted into the ward, and give rise to suspicion. If the matron’s feet were heard rapidly advancing, the half-baked cake was concealed, and the coolest denial to the matron’s doubts was given on the instant.

“Pints” have been altered more than once on account of the surreptitious bakings of bread or meat saved from the dinner. Pewter was found to melt readily over a gas flame, and tin cans were substituted, the bottoms of which became unsoldered and dropped out when they were next used, and so pewter again became in the ascendant.*

The punishment for melting dinner cans or “pints” was exceedingly heavy, and tended to check in a great degree the practice; but now and then there stole into the wards a peculiar aroma of overdone crust and melted pewter, symbolical of experimental cooking.

* Pewter, however, was confined to Brixton Prison. An ingenious male prisoner at Millbank contrived to melt his pewter pint into the shape of a key, and thereby placed that metal “under suspicion” again.

CHAPTER XXXII.

PRISON CHARACTERS: GRAHAM

I AM indebted for part of this slight sketch of prison character to the late Miss Fanny Hucker, who resigned her situation as matron of Brixton Prison for the matron's post at the Prisoners' Aid Society. At the latter establishment she died, a very young woman, worn out with toil and anxiety for the reformation of her fallen sisterhood.

Miss Hucker was an able matron at Brixton Prison, and proved herself a clever superintendent of the female branch of the Prisoners' Aid for the little time that she fulfilled her duties there. She was a thoughtful, pious, intensely earnest woman, with her soul in the good work that lay before her; a favourite with the prisoners at Brixton; a kind friend to the discharged prisoners who afterwards placed themselves beneath her guidance: ever a good officer and a Christian.

Miss Hucker, from her change of duties, had great advantages in observing the woman, whom, for certain reasons, I will call Graham, both in her prison life and in the life beyond it. Miss Hucker obtained her appointment at the Prisoners' Aid almost at the same time as Graham obtained her license, or ticket-of-leave, and passed from her cell to the house at Pimlico provided as a refuge for those women anxious to do well.

Very simply, but very touchingly, Miss Hucker related

to me, only a little while before her death, the history of Graham, a woman I had known and been interested in during her sojourn at Millbank and Brixton Prisons. Graham was a Scotchwoman, and a native, I believe, of Edinburgh. When a very young woman, according to her own story, which there is no reason for doubting, she was led away by a female friend, less scrupulous than herself, to visit a low dancing-room, and by degrees to imbibe a taste for dancing and low society. She became a source of anxiety to her friends, made disreputable acquaintances, grew callous to remonstrance, went wrong, and ran away from home to the cruel, soul-destroying streets. Here she went from bad to worse, until she became mixed up in a quarrel at an infamous house, resulting in the robbery and almost murder of a victim who had been inveigled there. She was sentenced to twenty-one years' transportation, her accomplice—the same woman who had led her away in the first instance—suffering also a similar sentence. Graham always maintained that it was this woman who struck the man on the head from behind; that the project was altogether hers, that she had no share in it, and that the result was a surprise and horror to her. How far that may be true, or whether there be any modicum of truth in that part of her assertion, I have no means of ascertaining. It is so old a story, this innocence of all intention to commit the last deed that locks them up for ten, fifteen, twenty years, or life, that prison matrons will grow sceptical.

Graham in due course arrived at Millbank Prison, a young woman, fretful, capricious, and prone to much excitement. Her behaviour at Millbank was not of a first-class order; she obtained many reports for disorderly conduct, broke out as frequently as other women, and gained the sad repute of being dangerous and untrustworthy. Still, she was not the worst of prisoners; there were evident signs of turning to the better side, and at uncertain intervals she would evince a good temper, and an anxiety to please, that kept her out of the list of women utterly incorrigible. She was one of the early transfers to Brixton Prison, when it was opened as a female convict establishment, under the superintendence of Mrs. Martin—a painstaking, energetic superintendent.

In Graham's transfers from Glasgow to Millbank, and from Millbank to Brixton, the accomplice in her crime followed side by side; and it is worth recording, in the annals of human inconsistency, that these two women, who in the world together had been the staunchest friends, the most inseparable companions, were the bitterest and most implacable enemies during the eight and a half years which they served before a license of departure was granted by the Secretary of State. The one looked upon the other as the cause of all the trouble that had brought her into her present position, and cursed her for a false and wicked woman, without whose evil counsel the light of freedom might have been indulged in to that day. Silent and sullen

they passed each other in their walks, the remembrance of their last criminal act ever a shadow between them.

Graham at Brixton Prison was a different woman from Graham at Millbank. The slight liberties allowed there seemed an incentive to exertion; and she worked upwards for her badges, became a civil and orderly prisoner, grateful for a kind word from the matrons, and evincing for her own particular officers respect, and even affection. Years before her liberty was granted she was a Number One woman, earning her shilling a week, handy in the officers' rooms, cleaning wards, and acting in the infirmary—always better able to agree with her officers than with her fellow-prisoners. Now and then, when acting in the laundry with the prisoners, Graham would be put out of temper, and nearly risk the loss of her badge; and as she was always a well-conducted woman, if not exposed to any undue irritation, it was found expedient to keep her more from the general body.

It seems a strange point to dwell upon in the case of a prisoner convicted of robbery with violence, but it may be said here that Graham was strictly *honest*. Acts of pilfering, in any way or shape—and the infirmary offered a chance or two of the kind—Graham was above. In attending to her officer's bedroom, a pile of untold money might have been left in any part of the room, without this woman being tempted to touch a farthing. On one occasion when a matron was sick, and Graham and another prisoner had been accustomed to go in and out of her room, some little trinket belonging to the patient

was missing, and Graham's suppressed excitement at the loss showed how she feared that suspicion of the abstraction might fasten upon her. She had her doubts of the other woman, a half-witted creature, very nimble with her fingers, and very much attached to herself; and she called her aside, and vowed eternal vengeance on her, and a course of torture, to which tearing her piecemeal should be heaven in comparison, if she didn't restore the trinket to its place. In half an hour after this conference, and when the matron was making up her mind to the loss, and not report her own sin of omission in leaving temptation in the way of the prisoners, the woman entered, made a feint of picking up the trinket, and, with a silly air, saying—

“Is this what you was a-talking about, on the floor here?” she laid it on the dressing-table, and skulked off.

Graham, during the last year of her stay, I believe, was wholly employed in the infirmary—a valuable prison servant, who could be trusted with anything. About this time another matron fell ill—seriously and dangerously ill—and was removed from her own room to a special one adjoining the infirmary, and out of the way and bustle of the prison itself. To this matron Graham had long since evinced an attachment, and it became her duty, in a great degree, to wait upon her and her sister, who, I believe, was kindly allowed by the Directors to act, under the special circumstances, as her nurse. I should have liked, in this place, to testify to the great forethought and general good feeling of this matron;

but as she may be still in the service, and as, from my past knowledge of her character, I feel assured I should be giving her pain by the introduction of her name into this work, I can but simply testify to her merits.

Graham waited on the sick matron for a few weeks, never demurring to the extra trouble incurred by the invalid's long stay; and that any little trouble which is new and additional will throw a woman into a paroxysm of rage, the reader is sufficiently acquainted with prison character to be aware.

“Don't ye think now, lassie, that if ye could try that jelly, or that beef-tea, ye'd feel the better for it?” Graham was asking at every hour of the day.

She not only never demurred to trouble, but took a pride in her task and in her position; and when the matron was strong enough to bear it, she and her kind attendant had many bits of gossip about the liberty days, when the latter should be free. Graham had a “pal” in the prison, a pretty young woman, whose character was exceedingly doubtful, and whose time for leaving was within a few weeks of her own—and there were many conversations between the matron and Graham concerning this woman, whom I may designate Francis.

Graham and Francis had been friends in prison, and might become more friendly out of it; and the matron feared that the few good steps made by the former might be rendered nugatory by the evil example that it was feared the prisoner Francis was only too eager to afford.

“Don’t have anything to say to Francis when you have obtained your liberty, Graham,” said this matron once; “I am afraid she will do you no good, if you take her as a companion.”

“Dinna fear,” was the answer; “I’ll go straight to the Prisoners’ Aid that they have been talking about, and get a place as servant somewhere. Francis is a lassie all very well in this place, but not out o’ it. Can’t ye trust me, miss, when I say so?”

The matron was well connected; and Graham used to drop many hints of the happiness of her future life, if she could obtain a cook or housemaid’s place in the service of some one who could trust her.

Time passed on; the matron became strong enough to be removed into the country; Graham received her liberty, and went straight to the Prisoners’ Aid, that refuge from a sinful world, which the pleasant face of Miss Hucker made more of a home to her. The *finale* to this story, as already stated, I learned from that lady, whose position afforded her the opportunity of becoming acquainted with it.

Graham had not been, I believe, more than a week at the Prisoners’ Aid, when a married sister of the sick officer arrived, to offer her a place in her household. As related to me, the effect of this offer on the woman was very touching; her hands dropped to her side, her face turned deathly white, then became suffused with crimson, and her excited feelings at last found relief in a passionate outburst of tears.

“Dinna say mair yet, lady: it’s too good to be true, surely!”

It was some time before Graham could find courage to hear the particulars of the situation proffered; of the salary that was to be given; of the efforts that would be made—remembering what a kind and faithful nurse she had been—to make her position a happy one, and to keep inviolate the secret of her past misspent life.

Graham brightened up before the interview was over, and accepted, with a thousand thanks and blessings, the situation that had been offered her.

“I shall see Miss —— again, too,” she exclaimed; “why, I shall make a raal hame o’ yer house, my bonny lady. Ye are treating me too kindly, and I dinna deserve it *yet*.”

The woman was all gratitude, and I believe, despite the sad sequel to this story—despite after appearances, which cast a shadowy suspicion on her—repaired to this situation with a resolution to do well, and to strive to deserve the confidence placed in her.

And all honour to those who have the courage to place that confidence, for they are the real and best supporters of such establishments as that which Graham quitted. If there are instances where such confidence is misplaced, and the trust abused, there are instances more frequent still of men and women being won back to the right path, and the honest life from which they fell. It requires no small amount of moral courage to place in one’s house a woman whose antecedents are

repellent, who makes little profession of amendment, or perhaps too much, and so suggests doubts as to her sincerity; and those who possess that courage, and have that fellow-sympathy with God's unfortunates, command our high esteem.

The experiment was tried with Graham, and she took her allotted post, and became a faithful, honest servant, whose exertions were unremitting to do her duty, and prove herself a useful subordinate. Her affection for those who encouraged her by their kind, cheering words was demonstrative, but it was genuine; and her love for some little children in the house made her a great favourite with them, and won all their hearts towards her.

She was truly happy for a time; implicit confidence was placed in her; there was no shadow of the prison life to darken her rejoicing until a certain day when a letter came by post for her, and she was found crying in her room a short while afterwards.

The true contents of that letter were never divulged. Graham alleged that it was a missive from a sister in Edinburgh, with the news of her little niece's death, and no effort was made to intrude upon her confidence by any inquisitive examination. The news was accepted as truth; she was condoled with on the loss of her niece; she resumed her work in as fair a manner, but never again with the same spirit, as before. She was still faithful in her service, still interested in the children, but there was evidently a change. She became thoughtful, and would be found standing in her

room, absorbed in her own reveries—weighing, perhaps, the chances for good against the temptation to evil, and striking the balance between them.

The temptation was too strong! She became restless and unsettled—anxious to see her old officer, Miss Hucker, she said, and obtained, more than once, leave of absence for that purpose. At last she was found missing one morning, and a letter was discovered on the breakfast-table of her mistress.

A very strange, passionate epistle it was—that was read by her employer, and afterwards transmitted to Miss Hucker—begging pardon, a thousand pardons, for going away, but alleging her inability to remain, and the impossibility of living such a quiet life! There were some rambling incoherencies about going to Brixton Prison to see the doctor concerning her lungs, and of returning to Edinburgh to her sister, winding up again with an earnest “pardon me—but I must go!” and a prayer for every blessing to descend on the mistress, her sister, and her children, for all the kindness and faith exhibited to “their unfortunate servant,

“MARY GRAHAM.”

Graham had made a hasty dash away, as if torn by the Father of Evil himself from the honest life she had been pursuing. Her workbox was left open on the drawers—her trunk of clothes unfastened in her room; the bed had been lain on, but only on the outside, on the preceding night. There was some housekeeping

money, of which she had been left in charge the night before, to a fraction, by the side of the note; and the plate had been carefully counted and put in its usual place, with honest regularity to the last. She left behind her the remembrance of a faithful servant for the time—"You will find all right, dear Mrs. ——," she had added, almost proudly, by way of postscript to her letter.

Graham never reappeared at her mistress's house. In the course of a few days she sent a messenger with a brief note, requesting that her boxes might be delivered; and from the answers given to a few inquiries made of that messenger, it was evident that there was an intention to conceal all true details of the present life of Mary Graham. Like a dark shadow in a dream, she passed away, a sad instance of the devil gaining the mastery, that is painful to record. Some months afterwards, she was seen by an officer of our prisons wandering about the Haymarket with Francis, and both hastened down a street upon being recognised. Miss Hucker has since died, and Graham, at least, has not had her license revoked, and been sent to Brixton to work out the full term of her dreadful sentence. To Francis, and to Francis alone, I think, must be attributed this last deviation from the good way. There is very little doubt that it was Francis's letter that unsettled the feeble mind of Graham. By a few it is considered that it was a carefully elaborated scheme to meet together from the first—that it had been arranged

beforehand, and that not a step laid down was varied from. This surmise must of necessity be false in some respects—it is, I believe, altogether false.

That Graham intended reformation when she left the Prisoners' Aid for service; that it was a hard struggle, at last, between the good and evil angels for the mastery, I am as fully convinced as I am that the result was disheartening and sorrowful.

And in a world where sin and sorrow must, by the laws that govern them, exert their influence at times, such results here and there will infallibly occur; and dishearten Christian efforts.

For a wisely hidden purpose, it seems as if there were some natures so utterly unstable, that they are without courage to resist temptation, and their power to work evil is as the strength of a giant. In a mystic work of Bulwer Lytton's, we read of a wand possessing the power to draw towards it from a long distance, and however unwilling, the person indicated by the will of him who sets the magic in motion. It is spoken of as a power in the mystic world to draw the victim towards evil, as the loadstone attracts steel to itself. We can smile at the exaggeration, and criticise keenly a story that depends upon such machinery for its working; but the power to lure from right unto wrong, to turn the wanderer from the right path, with God's prayer on the lip, seems equally as unaccountable, and is more awfully true. One can almost imagine the tempter turning such a wand to the breast

of the tempted, and luring him away from the fold by a means and a spell that in the bitter moments of remorse are scarcely understood.

God be thanked for the greater power that can shiver with its lightning the influence which distracts, and in its own time bring back the new heart, with the old faith in things holy!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE PRISON LIBRARY

A SHORT chapter on the small libraries attached to each Government prison may help to make this volume more complete with reference to prison matters. The collection at each establishment is not large, or extensively varied—being, more or less, a collection of duplicate copies.

To the libraries at Millbank and Brixton a female librarian was attached, who was responsible for the care of the volumes, kept a register of the women who had books in their possession, and of the titles of those books, visited the cells to collect and change them, and, if required, to recommend any particular volume. Every volume was stamped "Millbank" or "Brixton Prison," on the fly-leaf and at the end, much in the same way as "Museum Britannicum" is marked on the books in our National Library.

These books, on their return, were very carefully

examined by the librarian, to make sure that leaves had not been extracted; for wherever a blank space occurred at the end of a chapter, temptation was offered to the prisoners to add to their stock of paper for sly notes to distant "pals."

Instances of such appropriation unfortunately occurred with some frequency, and were severely punished when discovered. The notorious Ball, of whom mention has been made several times during the progress of these chronicles, on being once searched, was found to have no fewer than twenty-one engravings, carefully folded, in her pocket, for the future decoration of her cell. And the coolness with which the frontispiece from a work was extracted, passed on to some woman, and finally stuck against the wall of her cell, was only to be equalled by the feigned ignorance of any rules that had been infringed.

"I didn't know it was from a prison book, miss. Jones passed it on to me, and I stuck it up there to make the place look decent like. It's very odd," suddenly taking up the aggrieved side of the question, "that I can't have a bit of a picture without being found fault with. You're allus a-pitching on me."

The selection of these prison books was left to the chaplain, and the religious element naturally predominated. Some of the women objected to this, and one prisoner, on being asked if she would like a book, replied scornfully—

"Not one of *your* books. They are always driving

religion at one. Haven't I got religion enough there to worry me?" pointing to her prison Bible.

In the Brixton library there was more diversity of matter, and the books were chosen with some idea of interesting the prisoners. The chaplain, in a liberal spirit, had not wholly excluded fiction from the shelves, and several copies of "Uncle Tom's Cabin," "The Wide, Wide World," and "The Lamplighter," were provided for the use of the women, by whom they were greatly esteemed.

The books in circulation were chiefly histories of Rome, Greece, and England; "Leisure Hour," "Sunday at Home," "Layard's Nineveh," "Naomi, or the Martyrs of Carthage," "Rise and Fall of the Eastern Empire," "Paley's Evidences of Christianity," &c. &c. &c.

One woman devoted her leisure time entirely to the study of history, and considered it as an affront to be offered works of a different description; and another read and re-read "Uncle Tom's Cabin" till she must have known by heart every incident of that famous work. She was partial to telling the story to those women who were unable to read; and she would relate with such animation the villanies and atrocities of Legree, that considerable virtuous indignation would be aroused in the breasts of her listeners.

"What an awful wretch that man must have been!" was the remark made on that fictitious personage by a woman suffering a long sentence for the cold-blooded murder of her child.

About once a fortnight the librarian used to visit each cell to collect the books, and see that they had not met with any ill-treatment. On such occasions various explanations would be offered by the doubtful characters for a missing leaf or cover.

“It was all done before—indeed it was!” was the general remark; “I spoke of it when you brought the book, miss.”

Some women were strangely ignorant of the contents of the library, and asked for works not likely to be in it, such as “Jack the Giant-Killer,” or the “Newgate Calendar;” others wanted something with pictures, the literary merits of the work being of no consideration; some might have turned morose during the fortnight, and would read no more—they hadn’t got time—or, they hated reading!

Amongst the “breaking-out women” the prison books suffered with the rest of the articles in their cells at the time, and new copies were constantly being added to the library.

These prison libraries stand as evidence of the consideration of the authorities for the prisoners; and of the efforts made in every direction, by kind-hearted, thoughtful men, to relieve the tedium of confinement.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

PRISON CHARACTERS: ELIZA TRENT

I HAVE made some little alteration in the name of this particular prisoner. Eliza Trent is in the world again, and there is no probability of her return to prison.

At Millbank and Brixton Prisons Eliza Trent served several years' penal servitude. She was a delicate, pale-faced, attenuated woman, of four or five-and-thirty years of age—a thread-paper kind of woman, whose probabilities of serving out her time seemed from appearances extremely doubtful, but yet one who clung to life with a tenacity that carried her through many years of penal servitude, and left her free again.

Eliza Trent was one who might be termed a good prisoner; she was a woman who gave little trouble, and was cautious or crafty enough to present her best face to the chaplain and superintendent.

She was partial to long conferences with the chaplain—expressed, possibly actually felt, contrition for her past sins, and made to him many resolutions of amendment, which, let us hope, are being persevered with, now the world is open to her. She was a regular communicant, read her Bible in her leisure moments, and yet, despite all this, never suggested to her matrons that she was a penitent woman. That she was a favourite of the chaplain, who had his hopes concerning her, who reasoned with her, and prayed with her,

it is but fair to say here—although chaplains, in their earnestness and simple-mindedness, are often imposed on by a show of seeming reverence.

Eliza Trent was a good dressmaker, and when her better state of health would allow her to leave the infirmary, was accustomed to make the dresses of the superintendent or officers with extraordinary skill and taste. The peculiar trait of character which has led me to give Trent a place in my hastily-sketched portrait gallery, was her independent spirit—a spirit that led her into trouble, and showed itself in a hundred different ways. Conscious of being a good dressmaker, and therefore sought out by prison matrons who wished a “best dress” made up, she was eccentric in her acceptance of work, and would only labour for those officers who were favourites with her, or at those dresses which took her fancy.

“I very much object to common dresses,” she would say sometimes; “it is exceedingly annoying to be troubled with bad material. When you have a nice silk—I’ll think about it.”

And she was not to be persuaded to alter her determination, if she had taken a dislike to the nature of the fabric proffered her. To the matrons who were favourites she unbent more; would make their uniforms, and be very particular concerning the fit, but her principal pride was to work for the heads of the establishment, and to be entrusted with a costly fabric.

That characteristic independence of which mention

has been made, led her at one time suddenly to cease dressmaking altogether, and that at a period when there were very few needlewomen in the prison, and work was plentiful. Eightpence a-week had been the sum allowed to dressmakers before her time, and Trent struck for a rise in wages to one shilling, to be placed on a par with labour women, who received the latter amount *per diem*. The remainder of the dressmakers followed her example, and asked for shirts and other work requiring less skill, and yet paid for at the same price.

Trent was certainly in the right, and consequently had the best of the argument. She was a good needlewoman, and if any one was anxious to have her dress finished by a certain day, would rise at four in the morning in the summer months to prevent a disappointment; she therefore considered that the dressmakers were entitled to the highest gratuity allowed.

And Trent gained the day, and the shilling was awarded, much to the gratification of the prison dressmakers—an instance of a successful strike under difficulties worthy the notice of all discontented operatives. She was somewhat of a mischief-maker, too, with her fellow-prisoners; was partial to listening to their complaints, and to the relation of their mutual jealousies, after which she would exaggerate matters to the “pal” who had been the subject of remark, and so bring round a quarrel, or a fight, or a break-out, as the case might be.

“Lor, I shouldn’t have thought she’d have gone on so

about a trifle, poor creature!" Trent would say, upon hearing the news; "I did it with the best of motives."

But whether with the best or worst of motives, she was partial to playing the peacemaker, or general umpire in matters of dispute, in most cases rendering affairs a trifle more foggy and confused in consequence of her interference.

"She's a two-faced 'un," I heard a prisoner remark; "if I catch her making mischief about me, I'll shake the bony skeleton to pieces, if I have one-and-twenty days' 'dark' for it."

Other prisoners were jealous of her dressmaking qualifications, and were not sparing in their criticisms.

"It's only because she can make a good fit that she gets the upper hand, and is always being made so much of," was the constant comment.

Trent had her tempers sometimes. At Brixton, if I recollect aright, she fell into disgrace for striking her officer, an act for which she expressed afterwards her unfeigned contrition.

She is famous in prison records for her final exhibition of spirit. On being informed that her gratuity amounted to a sum in excess of seven pounds, she expressed her dissatisfaction at the amount, and refused to take a penny of the first instalment.

"I'll make the prison a present of it," she said indignantly; "I have been underpaid and unfairly treated, and I won't take a penny."

And she continued firm, and declined all gratuity, on

any pretence whatever. Great efforts were made to induce her to *borrow* a sovereign previous to her departure—which sovereign, I believe, was finally slipped into the bundle containing that second suit of underclothes with which prisoners are provided on obtaining their liberty.

But so much dissatisfaction was expressed by Trent, that it was supposed she would exhibit some display of temper at the railway station, and, in this instance, a male officer accompanied the matron in charge of her to the station. She was white with passion the whole of the way, and continued to dilate on the enormity of Government proceedings in cutting short her salary, and to resist all attempts of the matron to prove that the account must have been necessarily exact to the farthing.

“Well, it’s no good telling me that,” she exclaimed, “for I’m never going to believe it. If I am not to be paid a fair amount for my work, Captain O’Brien may keep it all, and welcome.”

When ensconced in the railway carriage, Trent made a further exhibition of her independence by placing her bundle on the lap of a prisoner opposite, whose liberty had fallen on the same day, and whose destination lay in the same direction.

“There’s another suit of underclothes for you,” she said, in a patronising manner; “they’ll be of more use to you than me.”

The woman looked rather amazed at this generosity, which was checked by the matron, who placed the bundle back on Trent’s lap.

“I must see you off, Trent, as the rules direct.”

“I shall give them away when we have started, mind,” she said defiantly.

“I cannot help that.”

And I have no doubt that Trent kept her word, and heaped her favours on her fellow-prisoner.

Her spirit cooled down, however, and she took a more sober view of things in the course of a few weeks.

She returned to her friends, and found voices enough in their midst to remonstrate with her on her folly, while her own experience soon taught her that a place in the world, with little capital to invest, was rather hard to maintain. She wrote, after a while, a very humble letter to the authorities, soliciting their help to place her in the Prisoners' Aid Society, and begging that her gratuity might be forwarded to that establishment.

What the result was I have had no means of ascertaining, but I think we may all venture to guess that Trent was not kept to the strict letter of her first resolves.

CHAPTER XXXV.

MAD PRISONERS

IT is a difficult problem to solve, whether the close confinement and the wearisome monotony of life be the cause of the brain weakening, or whether remorse plays a greater part than we believe—or even whether the crime itself for which the woman suffers be not a part and

parcel of that madness now less consistent with the cunning which made the deed resemble theft or murder.

In the case of Celestina Sommer, a mad prisoner already alluded to at length, it may live in the remembrance of my readers that general dissatisfaction was evinced by the public at the commutation of her sentence of death to penal servitude for life. The public could not believe in anything but a cool deliberate murder; there was great doubt as to the reason of her reprieve, and the press commented, with some harshness, on the alteration of sentence, both in her case and in that of Elizabeth Harris, lying under sentence of death at the same time.* Sommer, during her trial, had evinced great coolness and indifference to the details of the case as laid before the jury, and the signs of madness in her did not show themselves till after some period of her prison service.

It may be a satisfaction to those who wrote upon this theme to know that, had their expressions of dissent been listened to, a woman unaccountable for her actions would have been hanged, and the true impulses that urged her to the cruel and unnatural act would never have been known.

And in prison, with observant officers, surgeons, and physicians taking note of every sign of mental weakness, or every pretence thereof, it is, and always will remain, a matter of great difficulty to guess where sanity ends, and where madness is likely to begin. It is so

* Elizabeth Harris, see Chapter XLIV.

common a trick to feign madness, for the purpose of association, that many really mad are regarded with suspicion, and not sent too readily to an asylum.

The prisoner Copes, as already remarked, required the addition of Dr. Forbes Winslow to the prison staff before the truth could be ascertained concerning her sanitary condition; and it is still a matter of doubt amongst the matrons whether the verdict, after all, was a correct one. It is natural enough to be sceptical of any violent exhibitions of rage—the occurrence is so frequent, and the temptation to destroy besets so many of the ignorant class of prisoners.

Still, madness steals in amongst these women, and going to Fisherton used to be a matron's extra duty that was constantly occurring. I am of opinion—and perhaps alone in my opinion—that the doubts of a woman's insanity are carried too far in our Government prisons, and that, a long while before the surgeon or physician is convinced, a woman may be a living, breathing danger to her officers, whose lives, and particularly that of the one in charge of her, hang, as it were, by a hair. It is this reluctance to pronounce a woman insane—perhaps to risk a medical reputation by too hasty a verdict—that leads occasionally to horrible scenes in our prisons, and I cannot too strongly urge upon the Directors to inquire more closely into this matter. It is at least due to the officers to have a ward, or a portion of a ward, specially devoted to doubtful cases, over which a different management or a different

restraint should be exercised. Women suspected to be mad by medical authorities, and *known* to be mad by prison matrons, are treated like the rest of the prisoners if their conduct be not too glaringly outrageous; they mix with other women, are loose in the airing ground at the same time, and have opportunities to indulge in all that mischief which the cunning of madness so readily suggests.

In one instance the life of a valuable officer at Brixton Prison nearly fell a sacrifice to this grave sin of omission. A woman of that doubtful class to which I have just alluded conceived the horrible thought of murdering her matron, and so far succeeded in her attempt as to deprive the prison of that officer's services for a long period of time.

This woman, whose name was Kearns, had taken a hatred to her officer for a fancied slight in giving her a cap and dress of a different quality from that of the other women—a delusion which, allied with other eccentricities, should have placed her in a separate cell in the "Old Prison" at once. Kearns, by some means or other never clearly ascertained, obtained possession of a knife, which she secreted in her cell for some days, harbouring all the time her horrible idea of murder, with that persistency which is a singular trait with mad people in general. Early one morning, being a "Wing woman," and so not strictly confined to her cell, she begged very humbly the matron's company for a few minutes; she had found such a beautiful verse in her

Bible, she said, if the officer would only kindly read it to her. Suspecting no treachery, and anxious, as the best matrons ever are, to offer those little attentions and kindnesses which win upon a prisoner, the officer accompanied Kearns into her cell, and took the open Bible from the hands of the woman. "You'll see better near the light," was the insidious remark; and the matron approached nearer the prison window at the suggestion of the mad woman. The door was shut to on the instant, and, with a wild beast's spring, Kearns was on the matron, who, taken off her guard, fell to the ground with the prisoner above her, stabbing at her face and throat with a knife. Then ensued a struggle for life such as had not hitherto been known in our convict prisons; the desperate fury and determination of the prisoner, the fierce struggle of the wounded officer. It happened that the women I have already mentioned by the names of Graham and Francis, in Chapter XXXII., were in the wing, and were the first to notice that Kearns's door was closed, and the matron missing. There was a cry for the principal when the scuffling was heard inside Kearns's cell, and the key being turned by that officer, Francis, followed by Graham and the matron, dashed in to the rescue. Francis was the first to seize Kearns and wrest the knife away, and a year of her sentence was afterwards remitted from her term by the Directors in consequence. The matron, seriously wounded in the face and neck, and also in the hands, while using them for her protection, was borne to her

room, and the woman was placed under rigid surveillance, and immediately afterwards sent to Fisherton.

The matron lay for many weeks in danger, and for a long period after convalescence it was doubtful whether her nerves would ever be sufficiently strong to allow of a resumption of her duties. I am glad to be able to record that these doubts were gradually dispelled, and that this officer resumed her duties at Brixton Prison.

Mad prisoners were generally put in association, and the effect on the minds of the women who had charge of them was peculiar. Great judgment respecting this association should be exercised, for much depends upon the character and nerve of the woman placed in charge. The selection was made somewhat indiscriminately, and the nurse, or watcher, was often a callous woman, or one of a stupid, inane character, with no tact or judgment. One woman was so long in association with a half-witted prisoner, that she became almost half-witted herself; she had amused herself so frequently by a careful imitation of the antics, gestures, and facial distortions of her companion, that she began to indulge in the same vagaries when her services as nurse were considered no longer requisite.

As a rule, the sane prisoners were proud of being chosen as custodians of the insane, although the latter were naturally capricious and difficult to please. It was pitiful to see the woman whose mind was deserting her brightening up at the prospect of a companion who would make her rag dolls, or a pair of boots, to amuse her.

And some of these weak minds, in their second childhood, will nurse and play with their dolls with all a child's deep interest.

There are more women really and radically insane in our prisons than are supposed; consequently, all the conceits and vagaries of madness are prevalent in our prison wards.

The description of a weak-minded prisoner by her associates is not a little characteristic.

"*She's not all there!*" is the observation often whispered by one prisoner to another.

The religious element seems as often predominant amongst our insane prisoners as in regular lunatic asylums. Women will rave of the Judgment Day having come, and of the flames consuming them in their cells for past transgressions, with all the wild fervency of fanatics whom religion, or rather a perversion of religion, has driven mad. One woman was in the constant habit of complaining of the devils that haunted her all night, and sat round her bed and hissed at her.

Such women proceeded eventually to Fisherton, but there has always been an unnecessary delay in sending them there—and there is an old maxim that "delays are dangerous."

Some of these mad women placed much confidence in their matrons, and were greatly influenced by them. In proceeding to Fisherton, one woman seemed to be sustained against her horror of the train, and the speed at which it bore her to her destination, by the simple

touch of the matron's hand. In passing through the tunnels, she flung herself into the officer's arms and whispered, "Take care of me, miss!" with a touching faith in her guardian's power to avert all evil.

Self-destruction is the great temptation, here as elsewhere, to these demented creatures—the ills they bear being sufficient incentive to take that dreadful leap to the ills they know not of. Hanging, as before remarked, was the principal means adopted, and I think that too many of these cases are put down as feigned attempts in our annual reports. It is difficult to detect which are the real, and which are indisputably the false.

There must ever linger in the memory of all matrons who did duty at Brixton Prison, in the early days, the desperate leap from life unto death of one Mary Johnson, a woman of taciturn manners, and of a jealous temperament. She had been on unfriendly terms with her officer for some time, taking offence with the old prisoner's readiness, and brooding over her fancied grievances.

Johnson's cell was in the West Wing, in the D ward, the top one of the prison, which, as there was a fall of forty or fifty feet from it, was protected by an iron railing or balcony, of three or four feet high. Johnson had had a quarrel with a "pal" a few days previously, and this had tended to make her sullen in her manners, abrupt, and even insolent to her officer. One evening, when the prisoners were being ordered to their cells, Johnson begged the favour of a stay-lace from her

officer, who, willing to oblige her, repaired to the store-cell for that purpose. Returning towards the cell of Johnson, she discovered that the door had not been closed after the usual manner, and advancing closer, saw that the prisoner was standing by it, as if waiting for her. Becoming suspicious, the officer paused for a moment, when Johnson darted forth, full of fury and madness, towards her. The matron ran a little way back down the ward, followed by the woman, gained the store-cell, and shut herself in; and the prisoner, thus baffled, turned suddenly to the railing—and with one awful leap, cleared it, and went headlong to the bottom!

The dead, heavy thud on the flagstones below—the bloody heap of clothes lying there, to blanch every face and sicken every heart—the hush and horror of prisoners and prison matrons, will be remembered by all whose business lay in that prison on that memorable and awful night.

The woman, despite the height from which she had fallen, remained for a few hours alive, but unconscious, before death closed the tragedy.

Since this calamity the galleries have been wired over to prevent a repetition of the occurrence; and since the attack on the prison matron, mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, knives, to all prisoners, have been rigidly forbidden.

Such ghastly scenes in the tragedy of human life are fortunately not of frequent occurrence; the care and the constant vigilance exercised by the officers checking

most of the prisoners' attempts to destroy either themselves or others.

But from such extra responsibilities to the hard-working servants of our female prisons the officers have a right to claim exemption. In the case of women whose eccentricities are too great to allow them to be "in solitary," and yet are not sufficiently demonstrative to warrant an order for their removal to a lunatic asylum, a different discipline should be exercised. A special ward should be provided for women whose sanity is doubtful, and the proofs of whose weakness of mind are really apparent; it is merciful to the prisoner, and it is but common fairness to her officer.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

PRISON CHARACTERS: EDWARDS

THE subject of the preceding chapter brings this woman, whom I will call Edwards, forcibly to my remembrance.

Edwards was a fair prisoner, as prisoners are in general—a pretty-faced woman, with a high opinion of herself and her personal charms, and with a horror of being considered an Irishwoman, or of Irish extraction.

For a woman to have an objection to anything is an incentive to a number of aggravating prisoners to make capital out of her antipathy; Edwards therefore soon became a subject for practical joking, and was often roused to a frenzy by her co-mates and *sisters* in exile

imitating, with much burlesque exaggeration, the rich Milesian accent of the island she was so anxious to disclaim all knowledge of.

One woman possessed a rare ability for teasing Edwards, and making her her enemy; she had a particular wish to argue the matter with her, and would interrupt the discussion every now and then by the cool assertion, "You know you're Irish, Edwards. Why don't you say so, and be quiet? Everybody knows you're Irish, just as well as I do." And if these remarks occurred in the airing ground, Love, as the woman was called, had to fly for her life, and dodge round the other prisoners, until the unseemly nature of the proceedings called forth the matron's interference.

Edwards took an intense hatred to this Love, whose persistence in maintaining her Irish extraction would have incensed a female of much more equanimity of temperament.

"I'll have that woman's life, see if I don't!" she said to the matron, and she took an oath to that effect, which, as oaths of vengeance are prolific amongst female prisoners, was disregarded by the officer. Nursing her wrongs, however, Edwards continued to brood on the indignity of being considered an Irishwoman; and, full of a scheme to carry out her threats, suddenly refused to take exercise in the airing ground.

"I shan't go without you carry me out!" she remarked; and being in an ill-humour, she was allowed for once to remain in her cell, more especially as she

would have created the usual *furore* by rushing at Love in the airing yard. Before the women were taken into that yard for exercise, Edwards had contrived to tear out the frame and glass of her cell-window, which looked on the airing ground, and she had succeeded, by much contraction of her body, in ensconcing herself on the narrow sill, with two jagged pieces of stone used in cleaning the pavement of the wards. Love, however, was not well that day, or for some other reason did not leave her cell, and Edwards remained coiled on her window-sill, waiting to fling her missiles through the outer iron bars at the head of her who had so grievously tormented her. The next day Edwards again refused to leave her cell, and again resumed her post, where she was discovered, by the matron, in the same position, watching with the stealthiness and intentness of a wild beast. Upon being asked the reason for her eccentric position, she very plainly stated it, and confirmed by a second oath her fixed intention to stop Mary Ann Love from ever calling her Irish again.

It became necessary to remove Edwards to the "dark" for this threat, which, in connection with the damage she had committed on the prison property, constituted a grave offence against the rules.

In the dark cells Edwards continued for three days, rational in her manners, cool in her demeanour, and making no noisy demonstrations that would render it imperative to keep her in the refractory ward for a longer period of time. She completed her term of

punishment, and returned to her cell. Whether, during her absence, the window had been repaired, or by some omission left in the state in which Edwards had placed it, certain it is that she was once again in the same position on the sill, with the window removed, and fresh missiles in her hand, biding the hour of her vengeance. Love, the prisoner, was warned of the malice still fostered against her, and was transferred, I believe, to another airing yard beyond the ken of her enemy; and, as it was winter, and a keen, frosty air blowing at the time, it was considered that it would be as well to let Edwards tire naturally of her intention, and rue, of her own free will and accord, the subtraction of her window and frame from the cell.

Edwards, however, tired not of her resolves, but kept to her post and defied the frost, and the snow that set in after the frost, until it became necessary to remove her to another part of the prison, where the possibility of meeting her past tormentor would not be likely to occur.

Time went on; it appeared as if a change of cell and a host of fresh faces had dissipated the dark intention previously fostered by Edwards, and the matrons were congratulating themselves on her improved behaviour, when an event occurred that afforded a signal proof of the prisoner's concentrativeness.

The officer having occasion to visit Edwards' cell one morning, the door was left ajar while she discoursed with the prisoner. The cell was some distance down

the ward, at the end of which was a door opening on another ward, and a fresh division of prisoners. From this second ward there suddenly rang forth the voice of Love, engaged in some little altercation with her officer. Edwards' attention was attracted on the instant; the voice of her old tormentor aroused all the old vindictive feelings, and, with a sudden dash at the door, she flung it open, and tore at a headlong speed down the ward. The object of her rush towards the second ward was instantly apparent to the matron, who ran after her, calling forth her almost breathless warning to get Mary Ann Love out of the way. Meanwhile Edwards continued to run, not much impeded in her progress by the sudden clinging of an assistant matron round her neck, whom she bore along with her at an alarming rate of progression.

“I'll learn her to call me Irish!” yelled Edwards; “I'll have her life—I *will* have her life!”

But Mary Ann Love, by this time, had been removed out of the way, and the matrons of the second ward were ready to receive Edwards, and for the second time to balk her in her project. No further opportunity was ever presented to her to wreak her vengeance on Love; gradual signs of aberration of intellect manifested themselves, and in due course she exchanged Brixton Prison for Fisherton Lunatic Asylum. At the latter place she improved so much, that, a few weeks before her prison leave expired, she returned to Brixton to finish her sentence, to all appearances completely cured. Whether

she still entertained her past resentful feelings against Love, and had still the same objection to being considered of Irish descent, I have had no opportunity of learning.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

VISITORS

BOTH at Millbank and Brixton Prisons there used to set in a steady and incessant stream of visitors, furnished with orders from Parliament Street or the Secretary of State—visitors actuated by every motive for stepping out of their way that it is possible to conceive. Scarcely a week in the year occurred without some one from the outer world passing by order through the gates and being conducted from pentagon to pentagon, and ward to ward, by a matron of the establishment—a pleasant proof, if proof were requisite, of the unfailing interest shown by society in prisoners and prison life. Hither arrived the philosopher, who was anxious to carry out his theory, who had only a few questions to ask of a general tendency, and cared nothing for prison details or statistics; the man of facts and figures, big with his mission of finding fault with existing prison systems, as opposed to his own peculiar ideas of prison management, which Parliament Street tabooed, and to whom the Secretary of State was always returning vague answers through *his* secretary;

the philanthropist, who was anxious to see good in all, and to do his best to bring that good to light; the poet or novelist, in search of a new idea, which the wild lives of prisoners might suggest; the writer of magazine articles, the magistrate, the clergyman, the nobleman, the artist; the curious foreigner, anxious to compare English discipline with that of his own country; the visiting ladies, and the ladies who appeared to have strayed in from mere caprice, showing no earthly interest in what they saw, or sympathy for anything that passed before them during the regular tour of their inspection.

Visitors of minor importance were accompanied round the prison by a principal matron; great guns, who were likely to make a noise in print if slighted, by the governor of Millbank or the superintendent of Brixton.

Visitors at times are very neglectful of the prison rules concerning fees to Government servants, and singularly forgetful of the officers' feelings. The feeing of servants has become so much a general rule in society, that visitors appear awkward and embarrassed if they cannot leave a *douceur* with the officer in attendance. Possibly it will not be out of place to mention here, for the benefit of inexperienced visitors, that no fees are expected by the matrons, or are allowed on any pretence whatever to be taken, and that the offer of money to the officers of our Government prisons is an act which brings an indignant blush to their cheeks, and makes their fingers itch to box the ears of the

would-be donor. An instance occurs to my recollection of a visitor once coolly offering a sovereign to a deputy superintendent who had conducted him round the prison; and the horror and disgust of that officer may be readily imagined. In one visit made to Millbank Prison by a foreign prince of celebrity, his Highness appeared very much perplexed as to the right method of evincing his gratitude for all the courtesy that had been extended to him, and all the care bestowed to make him as thoroughly acquainted with the workings of the system as the limited time of his visit would permit.

“I should so like to make one small present,” he said more than once; and upon the rule as to the non-receipt of presents having been explained to him, he expressed his thanks very warmly and heartily for the attention he had received, winding up with the words—“But if I could but have made one little present. Oh! I *am* so sorry!” And the prince went away, truly grieved that he could not pay for the trouble he had given.

There was a rumour once circulated in Millbank Prison, amongst both officers and prisoners, of an intended visit from the Secretary of State. The prisoners became violently excited on the instant; they had heard so much of the Secretary of State, of the licenses that were granted and of the orders issued by him, that the whole body of female convicts began to suffer from repressed excitement. A general idea seemed to prevail that the Secretary of State knew all

about each woman's sentence, would be able to afford the clearest details concerning the day of her liberty, be willing to listen to the particulars of each case, and perhaps, in the excitement of the moment, knock off six or nine months.

“Won't I ask him about my leave directly I see him!” remarked one woman; while others said, “Won't I tell him how I have been served the last three months!” “Won't I ask if I may go to Brixton at once!” and “Won't I ask if he's quite certain I am not to go out before the twentieth—because he's counted it up all wrong, I know!”

A vague idea that there would be a kind of grand procession through the wards, with the Secretary of State at the head thereof, marshalled by the whole staff of the prison, was prevalent amongst the women; several fancy descriptions of his appearance were hazarded, and there was not the slightest doubt but that everybody would know him at once. And in due course, that important member of the Government passed through the prison in a quiet and unceremonious manner, completely deceiving the prisoners, who were very much discomfited a day or two afterwards to hear that he had called, had asked after no one's time, and had brought no information.

During these visits, the general body of prisoners are well-behaved and orderly: the discipline is very striking to a person unacquainted with prisons, and he is at a loss to connect such silence and decorum with the character of the women through whose wards he passes.

A male visitor in a female prison attracts a greater amount of attention than one of the opposite sex ; and in an undertone, after he has departed, a few of the boldest will venture to give their opinions on his good or bad looks, his height, figure, and general deportment.

In addition to the non-professional visitors, there are a certain number of lady visitors, who may be termed professionals—that is, who have a general order to visit the prison, are interested in the prisoners, and assist, in a humble way, the Scripture-reader, school-mistress, and chaplain.

Those lady visitors, who are kind and patient without being patronising, exert a salutary influence over the women ; and, as a general rule, the prisoners are respectful, and even grateful, for the interest evinced in them. Much good has been done in this way, and much good will continue to be done. On women of any thought at all it makes a deep, often a lasting, impression to witness these ladies' interest, their anxiety to see them better Christians, their efforts in every way to bring about the good end for which they unostentatiously and perseveringly strive. And to the honour of these lady visitors it may be remarked, that their interest in our erring sisters is not confined to the prisons, but takes a wider range, follows them into the world, and earnestly strives to give them an honest place therein. Prisoners who have shown a desire to begin a new life, and for some reason or other are debarred the privileges offered by our charitable insti-

tutions, have found sincere friends, whose advice and money, and whose homes even, have been generously proffered them.

Amongst so many, it is almost needless to say that there are prisoners whom no kindness will affect, whom no interest in their salvation will raise one iota in the scale. They are content to bide their time in prison, and look forward to the brighter days of liberty as to the old days of drink, debauchery, and crime, which followed their first step to ruin. Women will affect repentance with such semblance of truth that the lady visitors, anxious to make converts, are very readily deceived. One lady visitor, I regret to add, was robbed of two ten-pound notes at Millbank Prison, and all the search and vigilance of the matrons were unable ever afterwards to discover a trace of them. This is, however, an exception to the general conduct of the prisoners to lady visitors; as a rule, they are not insensible to the interest taken in their present and future welfare.

These ladies bring presents of little books to the women, which are first shown to the chaplain, whose verdict on their suitability and appropriateness having been obtained, the prisoners are at liberty to receive them. At Brixton Prison a visiting lady would obtain permission to read a little story to the Wing women, and assemble round her a number of prisoners for that purpose. If the story were amusing, and the moral not too irritably obtrusive—the fault of moral stories in general—the women became quickly interested; if too

religious, they began to whisper and mutter to each other and make grimaces. In what was termed the Old Prison at Brixton, the visitor was furnished with a camp seat during her little chat with a favourite prisoner in her cell. Both at Millbank and Brixton the visitor who preached the least was liked the most; for there is an art in conversing with such women in which some of the best-intentioned visitors are deficient; and to play the part of chaplain, and to play it badly, is a grave mistake which does more harm than good. To say the right word at the right time is a gift bestowed on very few of us, and it is natural that an error of judgment should be committed now and then.

Still, it is pleasant to reiterate that good is effected by the untiring and unselfish efforts of these lady visitors—that they are a little band of earnest-thinking, persevering women, who are often rewarded for their faithful services by a prisoner's struggles to amend.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

PRISON CHARACTERS: JANE DUNBABIN, LYDIA CAMBLIN,
AND JOHANNAH LENNAN

IN my sketches of prison character, it is somewhat late in the day to remark that I have not adopted any chronological order, but have chosen the subjects for portraiture more for the contrast their varied natures were likely

to present, than with any regard to the date at which they entered or left our Government establishments.

Jane Dunbabin was of the order of troublesome prisoners, difficult to manage, hard to understand, whose sanity was a matter of doubt, and whose prison virtues of order and obedience were not particularly apparent. She was a copyist of bad manners, anxious to imitate the more daring of her associates, and somewhat proud of the fleeting notoriety that might be gained by smashing of windows or a rending of prison sheets. Deceitful and crafty too, and with many monkey tricks, it may be imagined that she was one of the worst class of prisoners. Still, she was not a very desperate woman, and I have singled her out from the mass for one particular trait in her character that may be interesting to the reader.

That trait of character stands as evidence of the better nature lying deep in the heart—lying there dormant, mayhap for years, until some true word or action touches it and gives it life. Jane Dunbabin might have been a troublesome prisoner to the end of her sentence—and, indeed, I cannot aver that she was ever a model one, or a woman to be implicitly relied on—if she had not been transferred to Brixton Prison, and “taken a fancy,” as it may be termed, to a certain matron in the service there at that time. That the matron was kind to her and studied her particular nature a little, is to assert no more than that which one-half of the matrons attempt in every case; no

special pains were taken with Dunbabin, the prison rules were enforced in the usual manner, which somehow seemed to please her, and she "took a fancy," as before remarked. Dunbabin became always anxious to stand well in the good graces of her matron, and could be influenced so much by her gentle remonstrance as to give up any preconceived ideas as to a "smash" that might have been entertained.

"If you say it will put you out—that your head can't stand it—I'll wait a little while, miss."

"It is sure to put me out, Dunbabin."

"Then I'll put it off. Just for a little while, you know."

"Very well."

"You'll tell me when your head can stand it a little better?" she would ask, almost childishly, and would be appeased like a child by a promise to that effect.

There came a time when Dunbabin's better behaviour, at Brixton, brought about a transfer from the Old Prison to the Wing; and here her demeanour was a little more variable, owing to the absence of the face that had shed some little light upon her way. Still, the new matron also was kind, and her charge continued to improve.

When the old matron fell ill, and was removed to a room near the infirmary, the news circulated through the prison, and in due course reached Dunbabin. The East Wing faces the infirmary, with the airing yard for infirmary patients lying between, and Dunbabin

was accustomed to appear at her cell window for an hour, or even two, at a time, and stolidly look across the airing yard towards the infirmary quarters, where the matron lay sick.

At this time she made many inquiries respecting the health of the sick officer, and evinced considerable satisfaction at any scrap of news. That matron's sickness became an excuse for keeping Dunbabin in better order: "If you break out, Miss —— will be very sorry to hear it, and the news may throw her back again."

And Dunbabin, in consequence, would put off the evil day of breaking out, and console herself by climbing to her prison window and watching the one opposite, which she guessed belonged to the favourite matron's quarters. She now took a new freak into her head, the proper method of checking which, without bringing on one of her old outbreaks, caused no little embarrassment. She began to open her cell window, no matter what the weather might be, about the time when other prisoners were turning into their beds, and to shout across the airing yard, "Good night, my Miss ——!" This "Good night, my Miss ——" having been repeated twice, the cell window would close, and Dunbabin quietly compose herself to rest.

And for many days, until the prisoners complained of the noise, and the infirmary patients began to grumble at "that Dunbabin's foolery," the same salutation rang out twice every evening, at eight o'clock, with unerring punctuality. When she was remon-

strated with upon this little variation from the usual monotony, she took advantage of the noise made by the general closing of the doors in her ward—"shutting-up time," as it is termed—to repeat her good-nights for a few evenings, but finally gave in, and contented herself with gazing from her cell window, generally until the matron's nurse—or, as she became better, the matron herself—looked across the airing yard for an instant, before the infirmary ward window was closed for the night.

Dunbabin, in due time, took her leave, and has not been heard of since. Let us hope that the better nature, of which she had given some signs, has, with the enjoyment of liberty and of better days, expanded and borne fruit.

The character which stands second on my list, in the present chapter, I offer as a portrait worthy of public consideration, not so much in itself, as in the effect produced by its appearance on the general body of prisoners. The girl I will call Lydia Camblin was of the order of juvenile prisoners, one of the few child-convicts that used to appear at Millbank and Brixton Prisons, and offer a sad and striking proof of the vice which has been natural to them almost from the cradle. She was the youngest-looking, if not the youngest, prisoner that ever arrived to serve a long sentence in penal servitude. One could only shudder to think of the teaching that must have been instilled into her, to give forth such deadly evidence of apt docility in crime at an age when other children are innocent and

docile. Lydia Camblin was said to be not more than ten years of age; I have not seen the register-book of the prison, and, therefore, cannot assert that that was the correct age; certain it is that in appearance—which, with prisoners, is terribly deceptive—she did not seem to be older than is stated here.

A golden-haired, rosy-faced child, of slight, almost fragile figure, one could fancy her fresh from a loving mother's arms, and that some horrible mistake had placed her in the uncongenial atmosphere in which I first beheld her.

I have said it was more the effect produced by the girl's appearance at Millbank than anything about the girl herself which leads me to make mention of her name. Lydia Camblin was no model prisoner, nor a child deserving more interest or compassion than her tender years might naturally excite; for any trait of character that expressed innocence or weakness, or anything but the cunning and vice beyond her years, it would have been in vain to look. When Lydia Camblin made her first appearance before the majority of Old Prison women, the effect was startling and touching. She had been hastily attired in the regulation dress of the establishment—which dress, although the smallest-sized woman's gown kept in stock, was still preposterously long and inconvenient for her. When she made her appearance with the gown tucked and pinned up in a manner to facilitate her progress, and with that fair child's face under the great prison-cap, the whole prison seemed to stand aghast.

Women looked from one to the other, wringing their hands, and compressing their lips together; one woman clasped her hands instinctively, and cried, "My God, look here!"—and presently there were deep, convulsive sobs escaping on all sides.

"It's a shame!—it's an awful shame!—she shouldn't have come here!" more than one woman ventured to exclaim; and it became necessary to pass Lydia Camblin to her cell as quickly as possible, in order to calm the excitement of the women.

The first surprise over, the prisoners settled down into their usual hard, phlegmatic demeanour; Camblin was soon a subject for no further comment or excitement; but it was singular that, on her appearance at Brixton Prison, the same effect was created, the same chord touched in the majority of hearts not easily impressed by any outward circumstances. There was something so strange and unnatural in this child's position, that the sense of what was right—what should have been, had common care been exercised upon her—asserted itself at once, the instinctive flash of a true woman's sympathy and sorrow.

But Lydia Camblin was scarce deserving this attention: there have been child prisoners before, and since, more worthy of the honest sensation demonstrated. This girl might have been an old prison-bird of forty years of age for her coolness, presence of mind, and craft. She was terribly old in thought even for a woman thrice her age, was hard to impress, and difficult

to restrain. From her lips it has been the matron's unpleasant lot to hear the foul and obscene words which escape, in excited moments, from the most depraved of prisoners; one could believe in hearing her, and in looking at the pale, childlike face confronting the observer, that she was *born bad*, or that, if there were any parents whom she could recollect, they must have been

“ God and heaven reversed to her ! ”

I do not know what law allowed children of so tender an age to be placed amidst such scenes, but there were always in our Government prisons two or three who were termed “ Juvenile Prisoners,” and who, profiting by example, were often as insolent and callous as their older companions.

Johannah Lennan, the last of the triumvirate which forms the subject of this chapter, was of the old stereotyped class of prisoners—perverse, “ fractious,” and unmanageable—which began with prisons, and will last whilst prisons are requisite. That there was a little more originality in her escapades is the reason why I have selected her from the numbers like unto her, who keep prisons full and matrons busy.

If Johannah Lennan ever broke out, it was with a little variation from the usual manner, with a vocal accompaniment, or an extempore dance. If she were locked up in the “ dark,” her mind, active for mischief, would plan something “ new and striking ” expressly for the occasion. She was an adept in punching in

the pit of the stomach those male officers who were sent to remove her to the refractory cell, and was far from a bad boxer, when she thought occasion necessitated a display of pugilistic force.

Her principal feat at Millbank Prison was that of climbing to her window sill, sitting thereon, and passing her head, arms, and *legs*, through the exterior iron bars. In this extraordinary and ridiculous position Johannah Lennan would remain for a considerable time, refusing to change it, and expressing her satisfaction at the state of affairs in general.

“Don’t trouble yourself about me, Miss ——,” she said impudently, in reply to the matron’s remonstrance; “it’s very comfor’ble up here, and one gets a mighty lot of fresh air, which the Lord knows is wanted. I ain’t a-comin’ down these eight-and-forty hours.”

And Johannah Lennan kept to her position, until it became necessary to send for the male officers.

“Oh! here’s the lads!” she said, on their arrival; “as if I couldn’t a-been allowed up here a bit!”

“Are you coming down, Lennan?” was the gruff demand.

“Not if I can help it,” was the response; “I mean to stick here as long as I can, my fine fellers!”

And Lennan retained so firm a hold of the iron bars that it became an effort requiring no small strength to draw her back into her cell, she screaming, swearing, and blaspheming all the time. After a sudden wrench, a considerable exertion of physical force—“a long pull,

a strong pull, and a pull all together!"—Lennan and the officers would come down on their backs in the centre of the cell—the former with the frame of the window wedged tightly round her, a trophy of the strength and tenacity with which she had clung to the last.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE INFIRMARY

THE ruses that have been adopted by prisoners, and are constantly being adopted to the present day, to obtain admittance into the infirmary, may be regarded in a more lenient manner when the difference of diet and regimen between the cell and the infirmary is considered. Women who have been schemers all their life will plan for the better diet and the lax discipline of the latter—women who are desperate, and know no fear, will go within an inch of death for the comfortable quarters where there is no hard work, the companionship of their own class, and almost everything to be had for the mere request. Not that the inmates of the infirmary are all hypocrites or prisoners who have found a place there through self-injury; the greater number may be considered the really ill and suffering, whose health has been affected by prison air, or who have brought the seeds of disease with them from the outer world.

The diseases are of all kinds and characters—there is no particular ailment peculiar to prisons, save an imaginary complaint called the “prison mumps,” with which women fancy they are attacked occasionally. Pulmonary consumption carries off a few, but it is singular that the deaths from consumption occur more frequently in our male than in our female prisons. Dr. Guy called attention to the fact that, during one year, fifty-nine consumptive male prisoners were removed from Millbank, and but one from the female side of the prison. So great a disparity is not accounted for by the fact that the males formed seventy-seven per cent., and the women twenty-three per cent., of the whole convict establishment at Millbank. In Millbank Infirmary, on the female side, there were, during the year, only six women admitted who were suffering from pulmonary consumption; on the male side the number was not less than forty-five.

Now and then, on medical grounds, a true sufferer receives a pardon for her past offences, and is allowed to go free, that she may die in the arms of the friends or the parents from whom she may have fled in early days.

The infirmary at Millbank Prison consisted of a series of Rooms in Pentagon Two, situated over a certain portion of the superintendent’s quarters. Each room contained several small beds, arranged in hospital-ward fashion. At Brixton the infirmary was more apart from the prison—was in fact a wing near the outer

gates—and afforded accommodation for a greater number of patients than that of Millbank.

The rules were almost similar in both infirmaries, and the remainder of this sketch may, therefore, be considered as equally applicable to both.

An infirmary officer or matron was always in attendance, passing from room to room, and seeing that all was well and safe—a restless and unsettled post, and certainly not the most enviable berth in the service. There were also an infirmary nurse and an infirmary cook; at Brixton, the chief matron's duties were to attend to the requirements of those stricken down by illness.

The women, in common cases, were chiefly waited upon by those prisoners known as infirmary cleaners; in cases that were exceptional or of importance, extra hands were called into requisition. Much feeling and sympathy were evinced by the cleaners for the invalids to whom they officiated as nurses; and occasionally, on the part of the invalids, no little ingratitude for the trouble and pains taken with them. Attached to the infirmary was a certain number of cells, large, well-ventilated, and containing beds for invalids and attendants; hither were removed cases likely to prove infectious, or patients who, even in the midst of their failing health, were insolent, and fierce, and destructive to the last.

Infirmary patients were allowed the best of everything—nothing within reasonable limits was refused when requested by a prisoner really ill. One woman

at Millbank, sick unto death, suddenly took a fancy for grapes—if she could only have a bunch of real grapes again! It was winter time, and grapes were worth their weight in gold—the matron would refer the matter to Dr. Bayly, when he arrived.

And Dr. Bayly—that highly gifted physician was consulting medical adviser to Millbank Prison at the time—ordered grapes forthwith, at any price, and at once. It was a sick woman's fancy, but fancies even are studied in the infirmary ward, and great kindness is shown by the authorities in all cases. No hospital patient has greater care and attention; to prisoners who have been always ignorant and poor, the infirmary appears like fairyland.

Still, taking the infirmary patients altogether, there is not much difference in the character between them and their more robust sisters doing prison work. The same ingratitude, and selfishness, and callousness are evinced towards each other; and to the prison officers, the same duplicity, craft, and vindictive feeling. There are women whom nothing will soften, whom no kindness will affect.

“Breaks out” occur even in the infirmary; the passion of jealousy, to which all prisoners are prone, leading them to imagine that too much attention has been shown to one invalid, and too much neglect to their own selfish requirements. A woman will break out at a supposed slight, and struggle from her bed to wreak her vengeance on the crockery near her. One prisoner of the name of Armstrong, in Millbank Infir-

mary, took a fancied neglect of the doctor so much to heart, that on his next appearance, she sprang from her bed, and seized the poker with the intention of splitting his head open. "I'll learn you to say I don't want any arrowroot, you beggar!" she screeched forth.

The same woman, in the days of her convalescence, and probably to prolong her stay in the infirmary, feigned a trance with such excellent effect, as for some time to puzzle even the surgeon in attendance. It was more a state of *coma* than of trance, and necessitated the administration of beef-tea with a tea-spoon. After the surgeon was perfectly convinced of the trick—and had read her a lecture on her wickedness, as she lay on her bed, in as rigid and death-like a position as she could assume—she maintained her inflexible position for two days, and was only brought to reason by the mixture of a little assafoetida with her beef-tea, at which fresh insult she sprang up in bed and assailed the attendant with a torrent of invective only to be heard in its true strength and richness in the wards of our Government prisons.

Those prisoners who are well enough to leave their beds huddle round the fire and talk together in a low voice. Many stories of the old days when they were pals together, or their "schools" had not been broken up, or Jim had not thrown them over for the fancy-girl they are going to throttle when they gain their liberty, are related over the infirmary fire; it is these days of convalescence which the women prize, and which they are anxious to extend by every means in their power.

A few of the more industrious, who are anxious to add to their gratuities, sit up in bed and work at their handkerchiefs, or at cap-making, almost before their strength allows them; others, wholly idle and utterly careless about the future, will do no work on any pretence whatever during the glorious days of infirmity diet—of beer, and port wine, and mutton chops.

Every day the prison chaplain arrives to talk with these sick women; to strive at the old uphill work of reformation, hoping for better results in the greater weakness that has befallen them. His labours may be rewarded in some instances; in others, promises are readily made, to be broken on the first occasion when anything occurs to cross their variable tempers. The prayers of the day are read every morning, with more or less effect, according to circumstances. If a woman has died, or been removed to another prison, there is some chance of touching these hearts of marble.

Still, even the death of an old comrade does not affect them sensibly; the callous nature, in most cases, forbids any display of sentiment. In the last moments of an erring sister, there is a hush, mayhap; if a death occur in the night, and there is much wandering to and fro of prison officers and doctor, the women will mutter about "the row," and about their sleep being broken by an unnecessary uproar.

"It's precious hard, when my life depends upon it, I can't have a good night's rest," may be the muttered remark, as the complainant turns restlessly in her bed.

All depends upon the past character of the dying

woman: what were her antecedents — was she a favourite with the women for her “pluck,” or her defiance of all rules—does she leave a pal to mourn extravagantly for her, and have a smash at all the windows, by way of distraction to her grief?

It was remarked by a surgeon of Brixton Prison, that deaths occurred with greater frequency in the fourth year of a woman’s incarceration than at any other period of imprisonment. The following curious tabular account, in proof of this, was submitted by that gentleman to the Directors of Government Prisons.

YEAR.	Deaths during the first year of sentence.	Deaths during the second year.	Deaths during the third year.	Deaths during the fourth year.	Deaths during the fifth year.	Deaths during the sixth year.	Deaths during the seventh year.
1857 . . .	∞	4	3	6	∞	∞	∞
1858 . . .	2	3	3	5	∞	2	1
1859 . . .	∞	2	2	4	∞	2	∞
1860 . . .	∞	3	3	6	1	1	∞
Total . . .	2	12	11	21	1	5	1

Women naturally weak, or women whose lives, up to the period of their “misfortune,” have never known restraint, appear to give way under the confinement, after a hard struggle; but amidst these prisoners are several, who, with the less care and attention they would have found in their own homes, would have surely met an earlier death in the outside world.

CHAPTER XL.

PRISON CHARACTERS: MARY ANN SEAGO AND JONES

THE subject of the preceding chapter reminds me of two prison characters whose eccentricities in the Brixton Infirmary rendered them at the time somewhat notorious.

Seago, it may be remembered by those of my readers versed in criminal annals, was sentenced on the 22nd of May 1854 to penal servitude for life for the death of her stepson, who was murdered in a paroxysm of rage, by dashing his brains out against the mantelpiece. This woman became a confirmed invalid very shortly after her arrival at Brixton, and was admitted into the infirmary, disease of the heart, from which she suffered, rendering confinement to her cell a matter of impossibility.

Seago was only saved from capital punishment by its being proved that she had purchased a penny pie for the child within an hour or two of its decease, a fact that was set down in her favour, as evidence that no vindictive feeling was entertained against the child. Such was the effect of this slight fragment of evidence, which turned the scales in her favour, and brought a sentence of less severity upon her—a sentence that was just and fair.

Seago, when not possessed with the demon of discontent, was on the whole a rational prisoner, and only evinced her demoniac propensities when aroused by any

slight, fancied or otherwise, which she could take to herself, and allow to rankle in her mind. She was a woman of some education; fond of hard words, and in her best moods somewhat fine in her way. Lying in her infirmary bed, she was partial to amusing or boring her fellow-sufferers with lengthy accounts of her past respectability—the friends she had known—the home she had had—the father and mother who had brought her up so well!

If my memory serve me rightly, her father was master of a workhouse; and she was accustomed to speak of him with considerable reverence, and to mourn her own unbridled passions, which had brought her to so sad an end. A very little roused her; a taunt of the prisoners, a remonstrance of the matrons, would engender so violent a state of excitement, that her own life stood in peril by her passion. It was easy to imagine the fit of ungovernable rage that had ended in the death of her stepson.

She was fond of arguing, and as a little disturbed the even tenor of her way, every allowance was shown her, and the women, taken as a body, were conciliatory and obliging.

Seago, one day in the infirmary, took offence against her infirmary nurse, and, in the heat of her passion, suddenly turned out of bed, wherein she had lain for many weeks, and walked very coolly and stealthily from her own room to the apartment of the nurse, a little way distant. That officer was considerably amazed by Seago's appearance, and no less alarmed when she saw

her snatch up a knife that lay handy, and brandish it above her head.

Fortunately, help was at hand, and Seago was removed to her old quarters, it being impossible to punish one in so delicate a state of health. She repented, or feigned to repent, of this lact act, and became friends with the nurse again, until, on medical grounds, I believe, a free pardon was finally granted her.

Free pardon, in cases that must infallibly prove fatal, is occasionally granted; Government is not harsh with those whose days are numbered, and makes the generous offer of freedom for the little while that they may yet have to live. To be spared to die out of prison is estimated as a great boon by these sufferers.

Seago obtained her liberty, and was shortly afterwards found dead in her bed in the home to which she had returned.

The prisoner Jones became an early inmate of Brixton Infirmary, owing to her time of confinement drawing near. She had not spent half her probation at Millbank, but her condition rendered her eligible for transfer to the Surrey Prison. Enscenced in the infirmary, Jones became particularly remarkable for her fits of sullenness and obstinacy—pig-headed and indomitable doggedness, which no kind treatment could soften in the least. She was one of those hard beings to whom such frequent allusion has been made throughout this volume—taking all kindness as her right, and never, by a look or word, testifying her appreciation of it.

This indomitable spirit of obstinacy set in imme-

diately after her confinement—before four-and-twenty hours had passed over her head. She was always full of fancies, and a new and sudden whim seized her that a corner bed then vacated would be better for her and her baby than that on which she was then reposing.

“What do you want that bed for, Jones?”

“It’s against the wall, and the baby can’t fall out.”

“But the baby will be safe here.”

“No, it won’t. I know it won’t. I’m as certain as I’m a living woman that it will fall out whop in the night.”

Jones argued the point with such obstinacy, and exhibited such excitement, that it was considered best to humour her, more especially as it was probable that she would, at the risk of her life, avail herself of the first opportunity to take the bed for herself. After the consulting surgeon’s advice had been received, preparations were made for her transfer from one bed to the other. The corner bed to which she had cast such longing eyes was thoroughly aired, the sheets were warmed at the infirmary fire, and finally, with the assistance of the prisoners, she was removed in her blankets, and in her recumbent position, to the bed which she had so ardently coveted.

“There, Jones, now you feel comfortable and happy, I hope?”

She lay and reflected upon that point for an instant, then suddenly burst out with—

“No, I ain’t happy.”

“Why, what is the matter now?”

“It’s a hard bed. It’s not half so good a bed as the other.”

“They are all the same, Jones, I assure you.”

“As if I didn’t know, now I’ve tried ’em both!”

“And your baby will be quite safe now—if it lies nearest the wall.”

“I’m not so sure that it won’t get smothered there!”

Being still inclined to express her dissatisfaction, it was judged the wiser course to leave her to herself, and allow her to cool down by degrees. But she was not inclined to cool; she had gained her end, and the result was still extremely dissatisfactory—the corner bed was not to her mind, and she repented the removal.

She lay and pondered on the matter for some time; then, full of her new intention, with a rashness or a madness which only such women are prone to, she caught her baby in her arms, coolly stepped out of bed, and made for the one she had quitted only a short time since. Great was the surprise of the infirmary nurse, upon her return, to find Jones in her old quarters, grinning and triumphant.

“I thought I’d keep to my own bed after all—it was very hard, that corner one!”

Jones nearly paid the penalty of her rashness by an untimely end; in the course of a few hours, it was doubtful whether the shock to her system would ever be recovered from. On the confines of life and death, she lingered many days, only the greatest care and watchfulness bringing her round at last.

When a little better, the ruling passion set in again

—the effects of her own obstinacy had taught her no lesson. She was accustomed to sulk, and refuse her food, if certain extra privileges were not conceded, and in her delicate state of health it became necessary to allow her everything that she desired. When she was stronger, she spoke of making a nice cap for her infant to be christened in, and seemed wondrously softened by the matron promising to work her a cap by way of a christening present.

And in due course the cap was presented to Jones, who took it with a quiet "Thank you," and proceeded to give it a very careful and critical inspection after the matron had retired.

"And she calls this a cap!" was her disparaging remark; "and this is the thing that I was to wait for, and my baby was to be christened in! Blest if it shall!"

A woman who listened to this tirade thought it was a very pretty cap, and in somewhat plain language expressed her opinion of Jones's ingratitude.

"The cap's not good enough for *my* child," cried Jones indignantly; "why should my child be made a Guy Fox of with this thing?"

"It might wear it for once. It looks so to make a fuss about a present!"

"Just look here, now: this is what I think of *her* present!"

And the baby's cap, that had been offered in much kindness of heart, and received with such unthankfulness, was thrown into the infirmary fire.

Whether a cap whose texture and style were more befitting Jones's infant adorned it on its day of christening, I have no opportunity of placing here on record.

CHAPTER XLI.

FULHAM REFUGE

WHEN a matron shall write her life and experience at Fulham Refuge, it is possible that her story will take shades less deep and dark. It may include stories of a fair repentance and a new life, with much to encourage the philanthropist, and to maintain our faith in the grand old adage that there is "good in everything." It will be a record of experience with the best class of prison women, with those who have been selected from Brixton for evincing some desire to walk in a different path, and to turn away from that which led them to the brink of ruin. It is not to be wondered at that in my chronicles I have shown so little of the bright side, the best prisoners constantly and regularly passing away from observation.

So much has been said in previous pages concerning Fulham Refuge, that a little sketch concerning it and its discipline may not be considered out of place. Fulham is the last stage of female prison life. Having followed through two phases pretty closely, we can now afford the time to take a cursory glance of that institu-

tion, which offers so many advantages to those willing to receive them.

It is almost unnecessary to repeat that Millbank Prison represented at one time the probation and third-class stage of discipline, and Brixton the first and second. Only women of the first class, strong, industrious, well-behaved prisoners, who have received but a few reports during a long term of imprisonment, and have shown symptoms of a desire to lead a new life, are eligible for Fulham. As its name implies, it is scarcely a gaol; it is the neutral ground between prison life and the world wherein lurk all the old temptations to which offenders formerly succumbed, and thus became exposed to punishment. It is, moreover, the vantage ground from which may be seen a fairer landscape than women who have been benighted all their lives could have possibly anticipated.

Fulham Refuge was established on the 8th of May 1856, for the reception of the better class of prisoners. It was not opened as a refuge or a prison until attempts to procure the aid of private charities already established in many parts of England had failed. It was considered that there would ever exist in the public mind an insuperable objection to taking women as servants from a Government establishment itself—an objection that I believe is every day becoming less formidable. Will it be remembered by a generous public that no woman is recommended for a servant whose character has not borne a rigid test, and whose chances of proving honest and faithful are not in her favour?

The establishment at Fulham appears to me the wisest step forward in the true track of prison discipline that has hitherto been made. The better class prisoners look forward to it as to a rise in life, and work diligently for the privilege of a transmission thither. It might be on a larger scale; it might open its doors to women over forty years of age with some advantage; it might not exclude the sick and feeble—who may be the best class of prisoners too—from sharing its advantages. If a reward is offered for diligence and good conduct, by the laws of equality every deserving prisoner has a claim thereto, I think.

Still, Fulham Refuge only professes “to establish a sound reformatory discipline, combined with such an amount of industrial training as will fit the majority of the females for entering on an honest course of life.”

It is intended to constitute, as far as practicable, the *intermediate condition* between close imprisonment and liberty, or ticket-of-leave, in which, “under qualified restraint,” the women may be trained to “occupations of industry, the produce of which would partly pay for their support, while the habits which such occupations would create would tend to put the women in the way to earn their livelihood honestly, after being finally discharged.”*

The accommodation for prisoners is limited—the daily average used to be one hundred and seventy-four.

It must be stated, however, that there *are* disappointments in the moral progress of the prisoners—that the

* Mr. Waddington's letter to the late Sir Joshua Jebb, K.C.B.

weak will give way, and sink back into the old crimes; that the woman who has made much profession of "good works" will suddenly fling off the mask, and dishearten those who have been hopeful of her; that much kindness and Christian charity have been often expended in vain, and the old return of ingratitude has proved the only fruit. There are many exceptions, however, it is satisfactory to add; and throughout the report of the lady superintendent and chaplain of the Refuge there is evident satisfaction with present results, and hope and confidence in the greater progress awaiting them in the future.

The prisoners are well treated at Fulham Refuge; more liberty is allowed them than at the other prisons; there are constant association and better diet, and locking-up and unlocking are chiefly confined to the outer gates.

The principal employment is laundry work, but the making of underclothing, window-curtains, &c. &c., is not discouraged. The principal profit is derived from establishment and private washing; the far-fetched, cruel practice of endeavouring to make prisons self-supporting flourishing here as elsewhere. The annual receipts from private washing amount to close upon a thousand pounds—not a large amount in itself towards the liquidation of the expenses of the establishment, but a serious sum deducted from the earnings of honest laundresses struggling for existence in the neighbourhood.

The routine of the prison is as follows:—At a quarter to six the prisoners rise, dress, and make their beds; at a quarter-past six the labour of the day begins, and

continues till half-past seven, when half an hour is allowed for breakfast. At eight o'clock there is a general exercise till nine, at which time the women are rung in to prayers. At half-past nine, when prayers are over, labour begins again—laundry work and needle-work until the dinner-hour at one. An hour is allowed for dinner, and an hour afterwards for further exercise, and then from three to five the usual work again. Thirty-five minutes are then devoted to prayers; supper is served at five-and-twenty to six; labour commences for the third time at a quarter-past six, and lasts till eight. At eight all work ceases, and three-quarters of an hour are allowed for reading, conversation, &c. At nine the key is turned for the night, and the day's work is over.

Fifteen hours and a quarter form, therefore, the working day of a prisoner and a prison matron—work that is cheerfully performed by each prisoner and officer; and which, considering the anxiety of supervision, and the less restraint to which prisoners are subject, is a trifle more arduous for the latter.

These women, who are not punished at Fulham, are the source of much encouragement to perseverance in the good work commenced. They are industrious; many of them are anxious about the future—which way they shall turn when the liberty day comes—who will help them, and place confidence in them once again. A great number apply of their own free-will for the good words of the lady superintendent to find them a place in the Prisoners' Aid Society—or "The

Home," as that valuable adjunct to our Government prisons is termed by the female convicts. During one year no less than forty-one women went of their own free-will and accord to this "Home," the majority of whom procured situations thence, and are believed to be doing well. Here is the account furnished by the Rev. Mr. Innes to the Directors of Prisons of twenty-four women who left Fulham for the Prisoners' Aid some years since.

Out of the twenty-four there is but one bad case—the remaining twenty-three are accounted for in this manner:—

Emigrated to Australia	1
Gone to their friends with good characters	4
Lost sight of, but has a good character	1
Out of service at present, but had a good character	1
Believed to be in service	1
Doing well in service	11
Doing well in earning their own livelihood	2
Still in the Society's lodging	2
	—

23

The Rev. J. Innes adds:—

"This account is very satisfactory, and amongst these cases are some that most strikingly prove the inestimable advantage of timely assistance rendered on first discharge from prison, without which the future of many would have been at least doubtful, who are now acting most creditably, and have entered on a course of honest employment."

Of the religious and moral condition of the prisoners the late chaplain of Fulham speaks at length. So much true thought and feeling are expressed that I

should not be doing justice to my subject were I to omit his own observations on the progress of these prisoners. It is the last stage of prison life, and he speaks hopefully and eloquently :—

“The religious and moral condition of the prisoners generally during the past year has been, on the whole, very satisfactory and hopeful. Changes are indeed continually taking place, from the discharge of some women and the admission of others. The character of our community is thus altered from time to time, and we cannot but regret the withdrawal of one and another, who had become unusually steady, and had begun to exert a good influence on others around them. But still I hope we progress. Ground once gained, amongst the women, by the prevalence of a spirit of steadiness and sobriety and earnestness, is not lost, but tells favourably upon the next generation, who supply the places of those who have left.

“Our great object is to raise the women up in the social scale, as respects personal character and aspirations. In proportion as they acquire and cherish *self-respect*, will they be respected by others, and helped forward in future endeavours to lead an honest and steady life. And there is no feature so striking or obvious in the career of our women, while in the Refuge, as this increase of self-respect. They often seem to be quite different persons, when they come to be discharged, to what they were when they first came to Fulham; and if the improvement is so great, even while they are here, how far greater the change from what they were at the

commencement of their imprisonment, and before any portion of the softening, and civilising, and enlightening influences of the present system of convict discipline had been brought to bear upon them."

From a knowledge of many of these prisoners' antecedents—from the opportunities that have been presented to the public for watching step by step the prisoner's progress—I venture to predict results far more satisfactory than prison reports have hitherto laid before the Houses of Parliament, "by command of Her Majesty." Fulham Refuge is an establishment that must grow, and eventually become a central point of attraction to all connected with or interested in prison management. The practice of kindness and encouragement must infallibly bear good fruit; fresh experiments, possibly further concessions, will be attempted and found successful; from the Refuge, as well as from the Prisoners' Aid Society, good and faithful servants will be sought and obtained. When it is shown to these erring sisters that the way to right is not so difficult, and that the way to wrong ends only in shame and ruin (there are many, it is implied by the chaplain, who are scarcely able to distinguish the difference between vice and virtue yet), that there are hearts that beat for them, and lips to pray for them, and hands to help them, when they begin their pilgrimage anew; that their past life was a mistake, and the future, stretching beyond, may, by their own efforts, be so much more bright; when the example of those who have gone before is offered for their guidance on the path which

will then have been rendered perhaps a beaten track,—there will be no guessing the illimitable good to follow the noble thought which gave rise to Fulham Refuge.

CHAPTER XLII.

PRISON CHARACTERS: A LITTLE PRISON MELODRAMA

THE facts of the case I am about to place before the reader are so much out of the common way of prison life, that I have for a long time hesitated whether to state them, or to leave them, fragments of an untold story, in the mists to which they have receded. It is a story that, to spare the feelings of those still living, I find it necessary to enshroud in much of that mystery which appears to me objectionable, using for my purpose those fictitious names, places, positions, and dates which go so far to invalidate fair testimony. Why I have wrapped a cloak of secrecy around my principal actors the reader will guess before the chapter closes; sufficient, perhaps, for me to state that the incidents of this tale are true—strictly true to the letter. It is an old story, or rather, I should say, a simple narrative of facts. As such I will relate it, keeping clear of any temptation to colour too highly a single portion of it.

Nestling amongst the Welsh mountains was situated a little village, the inhabitants of which adopted most of the primitive habits natural to people isolated from the turmoil of cities. A quiet, inoffensive, religious

circle of inhabitants, amongst whom crime was almost unknown, and to whom an evening stroll in the valley, or along the mountain side, with service at intervals in the Methodist Chapel, formed the only change from the labour of the week. They were mostly poor villagers, but they were honest, God-fearing, simple-hearted people, who brought up their children to follow in their steps, and showed them, to the best of their ability, the way they should go.

It was the teaching they had themselves learned from their forefathers; it had brought that grace which is "necessary to salvation," and they had taught their children this. A few of the inhabitants of this village were of a class in easier circumstances than those around them: holding little tracts of land in the valley, and able to boast of the possession of a cow, a pig, or half a dozen sheep. Amongst these well-to-do people was a family that I will designate by the name of Ellis—an honest, hard-working family, the head of which had saved a little money, was a careful, almost a penurious man, and the owner of a very humble farm. The family consisted of Ellis, his wife, and daughter; the daughter a tall, graceful, warm-hearted Welsh girl, a comfort to her mother in her declining years—a secret pride to the father, who was not of a demonstrative nature, and made no parade of his affection.

It reads very much like a novel to state that "a mysterious stranger"—common to so many fictions—made his appearance in this primitive retreat, accompanied by another friend, on a tourist excursion through

North Wales. The travellers took apartments at the only inn in the village, and amused themselves for several days wandering about the mountain glens and valleys, fishing in the streams, or sketching those little picturesque nooks in which Wales abounds, and which are so dear to an artist's eye. At this village the travellers separated, the elder starting homewards, the younger remaining at the inn. The innkeeper, I believe, was a relation of the Ellis family, who were Methodists, and Jane Ellis, the daughter, was accustomed to visit her friends or relatives at the inn wherein the young tourist took his ease. Here a chance acquaintance sprung up—if there be any *chance* in meetings that influence our after-life so much either for better or worse—between Jane Ellis and the tourist. It is the old, old story to talk of acquaintance ripening into friendship, and friendship into love—of the affections of this Welsh maiden turning naturally to one who paid her much attention, and whose polished manners afforded so great a contrast to those of the rustic youths who had been smitten by her charms. The cruel old story of woman's love and man's fancy for a fleeting day or two—of the woman's trust and man's awful selfishness and crime.

After a month's further idling amongst the Welsh mountains, the tourist took his departure for London, with a hundred promises of a speedy return to claim Jane Ellis for his wife. The latter built upon that promise as one builds upon the hope of a life which, sinking away, must leave behind it shame and desola-

tion ; but the days and months passed, and the tourist never returned.

Then the whole story began to spread from one honest house to another, and whispers to circulate, and the finger of scorn to be pointed at her—a Welsh girl!—who had let the stranger overcome her with his false vows and lying promises. There was a greater shame to come, and the father, I have already said, was a stern man, who had known no disgrace, and could not brook it in any of his family. Rigid sectarians are prone to harshness, and the full force of the paternal wrath fell upon the head of Jane Ellis.

Jane remained hopeful long after all others were fully convinced of the studied duplicity of her deceiver. It was not till her father had made a journey to London, and discovered how false had been all the young man's statements with reference to his home, his friends and relations, that she became fully alive to the horrors of the position into which her own folly had brought her. Home became distasteful to her; the mother was an invalid, whom the shock of her daughter's shame had seriously affected; the father continued hard and unyielding, and as he would have no mercy, Jane Ellis ran away from home.

It would be a painful task to trace minutely the further career of Ellis; to dwell on each temptation that lured her farther away from right and truth. The decisive step had been taken; there was no turning back—or perhaps she no longer chose to return—God knows! Presently her only refuge was—the streets!

So, from bad to worse—struggling to drown thought—struggling to live, she was finally apprehended on some petty charge of larceny. Imprisonment for that offence was followed by wilder license—ending, to make matters short, with a sentence of penal servitude, and her arrival at Millbank Prison.

Here began the prison matron's acquaintance with her—here Jane Ellis proved with what frightful celerity it is possible to retrograde from moral rectitude, until no semblance of the early nature was left to know her by. She showed herself one of the vicious, ungovernable class of prisoners, resisting restraint and prison discipline, and defying both to the utmost of her power. She passed through penal class wards, refractory cells, and "darks," she wore the handcuff and the prison jacket, and her life was that of the worst of women, her character that of the worst of prisoners.

Her health began to be affected by constant "breakings out." When quietly disposed, and for a certain time restored to her ward, she was allowed as a favour the privilege of having the inner door open and the iron grating left as a screen between her and the wards. At this grating she was accustomed to sit and work—if in an agreeable mood, to watch for the smile of the matron, for whom she evinced occasionally a certain amount of affection.

One day visitors were expected at the prison. When they arrived, they were escorted round the wards in the usual manner. The gentlemen were more interested in minor details than strangers on a visit to our Govern-

ment establishments generally are. In due course the ward wherein Jane Ellis was confined was reached. Glancing towards her cell, and perceiving that only one door was secured, in lieu of two, an inquiry was made as to the reason of that cell's being more open than the rest. Suddenly there was a strange silence—a silence that struck even the matron of the ward with surprise—and the inquiring visitor stood, as rigid as a statue, staring at a face white as death, that glared back at him through the iron grating.

The visitor moved on, asked if the woman were seriously ill, the nature of her sentence, &c., and then passed on his tour of inspection, and left the prison shortly afterwards. Presently, it was noticed that Ellis was still standing at the grated door, as though she had been turned to stone.

“What is the matter, Ellis?” asked her matron.

“Who was that man?—what was his name?”

“I do not know. I have not heard.”

“Did you see him look at me?”

The matron could but answer in the affirmative.

“Oh, my God! well he might! Miss ——,” she cried, in a stifled whisper, “as God’s my judge, that was the man who led me first to ruin. Before I knew him, I was an innocent girl!”

She was taciturn the remainder of the day, evinced none of her usual excitement, and was discovered crying in her cell at supper-time. Later that night she asked about the visitor again, and, after a little pressing on the part of the matron, related the story

which, as briefly as possible, I have already given to the reader.

It was a strange meeting, and a strange meeting-place—and the story was told without any parade of emotion. Ellis behaved in her usual manner after this unexpected event, and only once alluded to it some weeks afterwards.

“Miss ——,” she said to the matron to whom she had communicated the story, “what did I tell you about the visitor that day?”

The matron responded briefly, and the prisoner turned almost angrily away.

“Ah! don’t say anything about it. P’raps it was all my nonsense, after all.”

But prison matrons are used to nonsense, and to stories that have no foundation. There is little doubt that this story was a true one, and the meeting between seducer and victim certainly took place as I have ventured to describe.

CHAPTER XLIII.

PRISON CHARACTERS—LIFE-WOMEN: ELIZABETH HARRIS,
HANNAH CURTIS, AND MARY JENNINGS

HAS the reader any remembrance of Elizabeth Harris, I wonder? The facts of her case, and of her trial for the murder of her two children, may linger yet in a few retentive memories. Her trial occurred at the Central Criminal Court, in the month following that of Celestina Sommer; and her reprieve, which was forwarded by the Secretary of State almost at the same period, appeared to give equal dissatisfaction to the public. There were no valid grounds for the extension of mercy to her—the case being a fearful one, and the crime one that nothing could palliate.

It may be remembered that Elizabeth Harris was only twenty-five years of age at the time of her conviction. She was tried for the murder of her two illegitimate children on the 9th of May 1856. It appears that she was proceeding to Portsmouth, to live with the father of her third child, an infant in arms, and did not scruple before her departure coolly to drown the two elder children, Ellen and Agnes, in a river near the railway station.

“They had no father to protect them, and this little one had,” she alleged, as her only excuse for the perpetration of the act. Suspicion at the absence of the children with whom she had been seen only a few hours previously soon led to her arrest, and finally to her trial and sentence of death.

During her trial, Harris was prostrated by terror and grief, and, after the sentence was pronounced, she was led from the dock more dead than alive. The sentence of the judge was not carried out, as I have already intimated, but commuted to penal servitude for life. Immediately after her respite, she arrived at Millbank Prison.

It may be thought that the conduct of a woman capable of committing such an act would have been, in prison, the reverse of satisfactory; that a nature so passionate and wicked would have chafed against restraint and the hopelessness of her future. Elizabeth Harris was another of those women who, in captivity for crimes of the deepest dye, become the most quiet and the best-behaved of prisoners. As a rule, murderesses are the women most apt to conform to prison discipline; they are anxious to gain the good-will of their officers, and easily swayed by a kind word. They are not, generally, of the lowest grade—that is, not the most illiterate or mentally depraved. The heavy sentence for life appears to weigh them down rather than render them furious with despair; and possibly the hope of gaining a pardon some day—even ten, fifteen, twenty years hence!—leads them to make every effort to merit the good-conduct badges, &c., which tell so much in a woman's favour when the year's summing up takes place.

Peacefully disposed, she had no quarrels with her fellow-convicts; she was anxious to work, and to work with satisfaction to her matron; she was ever obedient and civil. She was not a despondent woman—and it is a remarkable fact that with most female convicts the

sentence is considered a fair equivalent for the act committed, and they think there is no further occasion to trouble their heads about the matter. "The deed is done," and prison life is penance and absolution for it. Elizabeth Harris was ever a cheerful woman, possessing a brisk step and a bright smile—following the rules and plying her needle industriously.

She was disinclined to the practice of "palling in;" sought no favourites amongst the women, and objected to be sought herself. She was a woman who showed no little real gratitude for any kindness, which she returned with that irritable, jealous affection common to many prisoners besides herself. This proneness to jealousy was Elizabeth Harris's greatest fault. It annoyed her to hear a single word of kindness addressed to her companions in the ward, and she would take it into her head to maintain a rigid silence for many days after a kind word spoken to another prisoner. She never betrayed passion, or even suffered herself to be led into an insolent demeanour, or give a sharp answer during her brooding fits; but contented herself with dark looks at the woman who had received the envied word or smile, and responded to her matron in brief monosyllables.

When on terms that might be considered friendly with her officer, she often sought an opportunity of relating her own version of the act that had nearly led her to the scaffold—a version that, however little its communication may be desired, would eventually, piece by piece, be fully narrated.

Harris never expressed regret for the murder,—such expressions of repentance are naturally listened to more frequently by the chaplains than the matrons. She called the murder “getting into trouble”—a mild way of putting a case, her statement of which was expected to be implicitly believed. Still she might have deeply regretted the crime for which she was suffering penal servitude; she was a thoughtful woman, and read her Bible attentively.

Hannah Curtis stands as another favourable specimen of the class above referred to—a murderess, and a life-woman, whose crime was of a cold-blooded description.

The particulars I may briefly recapitulate here. Many years have passed since her trial, the details of which lie buried amongst the mass of fresh offences that have followed and submerged her case.

Hannah Curtis stood her trial for murder on the 13th of August 1850, at the Gloucester Assizes. She was fifty-five years old at the time of her husband's death, which, following close upon the purchase of arsenic “for rats,” brought upon her the usual suspicions and inquiries. Hannah Curtis, whose name was Harris at the time of the murder, married, within twenty-six days after it, a person resident in the parish of Frampton Cotterill, where the alleged crime had taken place. This precipitate match led to further inquiries, followed by an exhumation, and the discovery of arsenic in the body of the murdered man, who, it appears, had been under medical treatment a short time before his death. The woman stoutly maintained, as strongly after sen-

tence of death had been passed upon her as before the verdict was given, that the arsenic she had purchased was taken by her husband by mistake for carbonate of soda. It certainly appeared at the trial that Harris himself had frequently complained of rats, and spoken of purchasing arsenic for their destruction.

Still, the facts were strongly against her, and there was no breaking through the web of circumstantial evidence. Her sentence was, however, commuted to penal servitude for life. At fifty-five years of age, this feeble woman, still protesting her innocence, was passed from Gloucester Gaol to the prison at Millbank.

As an inmate of a convict prison, Hannah Curtis's character shone very brightly, by way of contrast with that of the general body of prisoners. It was difficult for even a prison matron to imagine that a woman of her appearance and manners could have been led to the perpetration of so heinous a crime. A tall, grey-haired woman, looking older than her years, bent nearly double, and leaning on a stick; a woman with a kind, motherly face.

The prisoners took readily to her, called her "mother," and tried to assist her in various little ways.

"Oh! isn't she like the mother I ran away from twenty years ago?" a prisoner cried once. "I wish," with a little shudder, "they'd put her somewhere else than near to me!"

Curtis, soon after her removal to Brixton, became an inmate of the prison nursery, or of the convalescent part of it, amusing herself by needlework, by talking

to the young mothers and the little children, and giving them that advice for the future regulation of their conduct which, in her old age, if her sentence was just, she had herself neglected.

Without an angry word, or a gesture of dissatisfaction, Curtis seemed to spend a pleasant time at Brixton Prison; content with her position in society—or away from it—interested in passing events, pleased with the children that her own illness threw her amongst, and quite a mother, in her way, to all with whom she was brought in contact. She was a life-woman, and the sentence—judging by outward appearances, which, however, are ever deceitful—did not affect her.

“It’s a very comfortable place,” she said, looking round the prison once; “dear heart, who’d a thought of its being such a comfortable place?”

She soon grew very feeble, moved from room to room with the aid of her stick, and faltered in her gait. She was constant in the discharge of religious duties, evinced an interest in sacred matters, and yet, amidst all this, made no parade of her sentiments, or of a change—if there were a change—in her heart and thoughts.

Becoming almost a confirmed invalid, she expressed once or twice, I believe, a wish to die out of prison, and near those friends and relations from whom she was isolated. Upwards of ten of her declining years had been spent in prison—a dishonourable old age, under which women more sensitive than she would have sunk long ago; it was considered fair and merciful to let her spend her few remaining days apart from prison life.

Strong recommendations as to her orderly conduct, her religious feeling, and her great debility, were forwarded to the Secretary of State, and in due course a free pardon was sent for Hannah Curtis, who quitted the prison, to the great regret of the women who had had any acquaintance with her.

“She was just like a mother to us,” one remarked.

“A blessed sight better mother than ever I had the luck of!” was the coarse comment of the prisoner addressed.

The third life-woman on my list, whose name may not be quite unfamiliar to my readers, stands as another instance of the worst criminal often proving herself the best-conducted prisoner.

Mary Jennings was of the quiet order of prisoners—well-ordered and taciturn, yet ever willing to oblige. A woman of a reticent nature, who expressed no emotion, and went about her duties in a business-like manner, and with a grave, earnest face.

Mary Jennings was tried for the attempted murder of her child, some years ago. The case was a bad one, and there were very few extenuating circumstances. It was an act of sheer malice, and the sentence was a well-deserved one. As in the previous case of Curtis, one could scarcely reconcile the commission of so serious a crime with the calm, equable demeanour of the woman, and that young passive face beneath the prison cap.

Jennings was evidently a thoughtful woman; in the monotony of prison life, and the regular working of its machinery, there was time for much reflection—and,

if so disposed, for repentance. Such a past as Jennings's there was no shutting out or escaping from—and facing it ever with that pale, almost sorrowful face, the matrons were inclined to think that, for all the guilty days gone by, the woman felt a deep and a lasting regret. We see “through a glass darkly,” but still the shadowy outlines of great truths will loom beyond distinctly.

CHAPTER XLIV.

PRISON CHARACTERS: SARAH FEATHERSTONE, MARY M'LEAN, BUTTERWORTH, MARGARET WILLIAMS, JANE WHITE, BENTON, SUSY DUNN, HONOR MATTHEWS, AMELIA MOTT, MARY ANN SMITH, AND EMILY LAWRENCE

My lessening space warns me that I must speak but briefly of the remainder of those prison characters concerning whom a few remarks are necessary. Probably this is the better course; there is a similitude in prison portraiture, and so much of character mimicked one from another, that, looking back at my past illustrations, I am surprised that there is not more of needless repetition. To the best of my ability, I have endeavoured to avoid this, and have, in more than one instance, excluded details which might have presented too close a resemblance to actions to which attention has already been drawn, even at the risk of lessening the number of my pages, or presenting less forcibly a particular character to the reader. I find that there

still remains to me eleven prisoners who are deserving a little notice at my hands.

Sarah Featherstone belongs more properly to the preceding chapter, being a life-woman, and one more instance of civility and obedience in women who have by a hair'sbreadth escaped the hangman's hands. A poor girl, from a higher position of life than most of the prisoners with whom she was classed—a favourite with the whole prison—more, so to speak, the heroine of prison life than any to whom I have striven to direct attention.

She was the heroine of a dark story—possibly a heroine more worthy of sympathy and pity than the offspring of many a morbid imagination.

Featherstone was serving a life sentence for the murder of her child.

The incidents connected with her crime aroused a general interest at the period of their occurrence, and much pity was felt for a young and well-educated woman placed in so awful a position. She was an example of the old story, to which we have alluded more than once, and which so often ends in a prison cell—woman's faith in the honour of her betrayer, to whom all honour is as dead as last year's leaves; the discovery; a sense of shame sending the trusting woman adrift on the world; madness, or a desperation akin to it, causing her to leave her child in a wood, or cast it into a pond—I am doubtful which—the death of the baby, and the arrest of the crime-driven young mother. A story not unlike Hetty's in "Adam Bede."

Featherstone, I may repeat, then, was the heroine of prison life; a pretty young woman, whom the prisoners loved for her gentleness, meekness, and submissiveness; a woman fully alive to a sense of her position, feeling it acutely, and striving by every means to make amends for it; a prisoner who never resisted discipline, and who obeyed all rules without a murmur. Every matron that Featherstone has had has been struck with her gentleness and lady-like manners. Every officer, at one period or another, has felt how singularly out of place Featherstone seemed in prison, mixing with women so dead to any real contrition. As infirmary cleaner at Brixton Prison, she won much love to herself from all classes of women; she had the art of imparting comfort to the distressed, and of soothing the disputatious and quarrelsome. Many women preferred Featherstone's mediation to that of their favourite matrons; they would do anything for her, if she only wished it, or made any effort to influence their minds.

Featherstone was a woman whose delicate health confined her often to an infirmary bed, but she bore the ills that flesh is heir to with a gentleness and patience characteristic of her under every circumstance.

She was a constant reader of her Bible; on her sick-bed or in her cell she seemed to derive much comfort from its perusal, and much resignation to her own hard fate. She was a regular communicant.

Mary M'Lean needs not such an extended description as the above: it is merely as an illustration of professional prisoners that I allude to her at all. She was

one of those women who like prisons, or who at least make that the excuse for their appearance in them. A thin starveling of a woman, of the quiet order, she was content to be locked up for a certain number of years for the board and lodging gratuitously afforded her—a prisoner of the “Granny Collis” species, but younger and stronger. She was a professed needle-woman, who complained of work being too arduous and too ill-paid outside a prison for her to keep a home and live honestly thereby—and so she committed a fresh theft and incurred a fresh conviction.

“It’s not a mite of good my trying to live outside,” she said once; “there’s the worry to earn a crust, and the fight to get work at all, at any price. I have no friends, and I like this best. Where’s the opposition *here?*”

Does not that “set-off” against prison expenditure, that shirt-making for City firms—and shame on the City firms who seek so cheap a market as our Government prisons!—work two ways, when the slaves of the needle succumb to the force of so ruinous an opposition, and take to theft, or worse, as a means of life?

Butterworth, the third woman on my list, needs but a passing remark, as we hurry on to the completion of our task. There is a story connected with her, which I do not give as true, nor can I assert that it is false. It was whispered through the prison, and is worth repeating here, leaving the reader to exercise his own judgment in the matter. Butterworth was a feigned name, it was said; all information as to her friends and relations was refused on her apprehension,

and kept an inviolable secret after her sentence. She gave birth to a child a few months after her transfer to Brixton, and never recovered the old strength prior to her confinement. In the sixth or seventh week of her half convalescence she fell suddenly and fatally ill again, refusing to the last any particulars concerning the child's relations.

"Send it to the workhouse," were her final injunctions; "it is better there."

"But you have friends?"

"Not now!"

And the woman died with her secret, resisting all entreaties to the last. The child was sent to the workhouse, and the name of Butterworth was added to the medical officer's list of "deaths during the year."

Margaret Williams was an old prison character, and will very likely remain so to the last day of her life.

To repeat all Margaret Williams's escapades would be to describe again the exploits of Ball, Copes, Towers, and others. A little woman, with a deceptive appearance as to strength, and possessed of a muscular power above the average of her sex. Constant punishment reduced her to a skeleton; in earlier days she seemed to wear out the strength of others and preserve her own.

Her principal feat was a sudden attack in Brixton Chapel on a matron who had reported her a few days previously—a fierce attack in the middle of service, and so unlooked-for and unprepared against as to place the matron's life in danger, and wake up almost a mutiny in chapel. The service was stopped; forms

were knocked over; women stood up and screamed with excitement; those in the gallery, where the attack took place, rushed one against the other, and added to the general confusion; the clergyman in his pulpit stood spellbound for an instant, and then strove ineffectually to quiet the raging sea of womankind below. It is singular that the woman Ball was again the means of rescuing the matron from her perilous position—so dangerous a prisoner as Ball was, she seemed ever ready to spring forward in the defence of a matron whom, under a similar grievance, she might have assaulted in a similar manner. There was no further morning service, it may be remarked, that day; Margaret Williams was carried to “the dark,” and the injured matron to her room. Ball, I believe, was afterwards rewarded for her valuable assistance by a year being deducted from her length of service.

Jane White, the fifth on my list, may also be classed amongst women who have sought extra notoriety by desperate acts in chapel. A prisoner of later date than her predecessor, she was almost as troublesome. Her chief eccentricity was to spring suddenly up in her seat in the chapel gallery at Millbank, leap over the partition, and proceed, with an amazing *sang froid*, to lower herself, or rather drop herself, amongst her compeers below, amidst their shrieks of consternation.

She succeeded in injuring her wrist by her fall, but not sufficiently to gain admittance to the infirmary, which, it was thought, was the sole aim and object of her freaks.

Benton's name I have thought well to enter here, not

for any particular trait in her character—save that she was of the class that gives little trouble—but for the fact that she stands in the register as No. 1 at Brixton Prison, and was really the first woman who entered that establishment when it was opened for the reception of female convicts. She served her time out, and made her second appearance in 1859, or 1860, under the name of Macpherson—having adopted the name of a favourite matron by way of compliment for past attention!

I need not linger at any length over the character of Susy Dunn—a coarse, troublesome giantess of a woman, with a certain keen sense of the ridiculous, that led her to commit many actions of a nature which need not be particularised too closely. One of her principal amusements, I may say, however, was seeking every opportunity to extinguish lights; putting the gas out in her cell, by covering it with her “pint,” and then arousing a whole ward by exclamations concerning an escape of gas. If she could cover a matron’s candle with her “pint,” at any time, or by any manœuvre, she would chuckle half the night at the result, despite the probability of a report arriving with the morning. Susy Dunn was partial to “breakings-out” and tearing her dress to pieces, and was a frequent inmate of dark cells and “refractories.”

Honor Matthews disputed the palm with Towers as to being the most wicked and the most evilly possessed of female prisoners. A more violent, blasphemous, vindictive, and dangerous woman never disgraced her sex. I have mentioned her act of destroying a matron’s

favourite cat by suffocation in "the dark;" actions that would give pain to others were Honor Matthews's chief satisfaction. She passed from prison without a hope that one good thought had been born within her during a long period of incarceration.

Upon reflection, I am inclined to consider that if a jury of prison matrons were empannelled to consider the relative wickedness of Honor Matthews and Towers, the verdict would place the former at the head of the list of black sheep.

Amelia Mott may be passed over with a few words. A dwarf, and a prisoner of the vexatious kind; partial to company, and, when debarred from it at Millbank, or in the Old Prison at Brixton, inclined to signalise her discontent by beating against walls, and screaming salutations to the next prisoner at the top of her voice. She had a peculiar screeching laugh, that sounded at odd seasons, and curdled one's blood. She would occasionally induce the inmate of the next cell to relate some story, or some incident of her early career, not too virtuous or refined; and Amelia Mott, after long struggling with her hilarious propensities, would burst forth at the top of her voice, and unsettle a whole ward. Many tricks of prisoners, whose names have been mentioned already, might be set down in her own list of exploits, for she was an admirable mimic.

Mary Ann Smith takes also her place in the list of troublesome female convicts. Not so particularly troublesome in the matter of breakings-out—though she liked a fair share in any popular disturbance—as

in her desire to be considered the prison jester, and to raise the laughter of the women on unseemly occasions.

Church was her general field for these exploits ; and there her extraordinary antics, vacant expression of countenance, or odd grimaces, were generally too much for the gravity of the women. One might as well have expected reverence from the prison cats, as look for any particle of devotion in that girl's disposition. There was a cool impudence in some of her questions, which rendered even the matron doubtful whether ignorance or impertinence were the motive for putting them.

"Miss ——," she said, one afternoon, to her matron, "I think my voice is improving."

"That's good news, Smith."

"Just you listen, miss, when we sing in chapel the *can of taters and dominoes*"—meaning, it may be remarked, the *Cantate Domino* of the evening service.

During the reading of the communion service one morning, it was remarked that every prisoner within hearing range of her voice was convulsed with suppressed laughter, she alone maintaining a devout expression of countenance—if a long-drawn visage and upturned eyes can be considered devout at any time.

The women knelt and hid their faces, and heaved their shoulders convulsively, at every response of Smith's, until it became necessary for the matron to leave her seat, and approach her more closely, to discover the reason for this unseemly hilarity.

The secret was soon learned ; Mary Ann Smith was responding to every sentence, "*Lord, have mercy upon us,*

and incline our hearts to keep jackdaws," with a coolness and insolence that continued even after the discovery. Punishment for offences of this nature did not work much good—Mary Ann Smith remained incorrigible to the last.

Her flow of unseemly language on special occasions possessed a richness of blasphemy and obscenity unattained by any other prisoner. Before a Director, even, she assumed the same free and easy insolence; on one occasion giving vent to a tirade of true Billingsgate abuse such as no Director, I believe, had heard before. And perhaps it is as well that the heads of our convict establishments should have a little experience of the very dark side of character which makes some effort at demureness in their presence. Striking, or attempting to strike her matron, was a favourite freak of Mary Ann Smith's; her idiosyncrasies found a channel for display in every imaginable direction. Still there *were* times in which she was taken with "a good fit," and in those few and far between periods no one won more golden opinions to herself.

Summing up her faults and failings with her better qualities, it may be said that, when she was good, she was of the very best class of women; but when she was bad, decidedly of the very worst.

Emily Lawrence, a prisoner of a later date, was concerned in a diamond robbery, which made some little stir at the period of its occurrence. It may be remembered that Emily Lawrence was tried, with her companion Pearce, in April 1860. Both Pearce and herself had been concerned in several great robberies

of jewellery, both in England and Paris. Pearce, who had been a skilful lapidary, and was considered an excellent judge of diamonds, was accustomed to accompany Lawrence, as her brother or husband, as occasion might demand, to the principal jewellers; there, by their specious manners and address, they would contrive to deceive the assistants, and abstract, almost before their eyes, valuable sprays and tiaras of brilliants. From M. Fontane, jeweller, of Paris, Pearce, Lawrence, and a third confederate, who was afterwards arrested, contrived to make off with nearly twelve thousand pounds' worth of jewellery; from Mr. Emanuel's, of Hanover Square, a diamond locket, value two thousand pounds, was extracted; whilst four diamond bracelets, value six hundred pounds each, were stolen from the well-known firm of Hunt and Roskell. How these valuable articles of jewellery were disposed of has been always somewhat of a mystery; the general idea appears to be that Lawrence and Pearce were members of a secret and well-organised confederacy, which had—and has—its agents in every large Continental city. Pearce and Lawrence were finally apprehended, and the latter was recognised by the police as a woman who had been previously convicted for a clever act of shoplifting. Both prisoners were found guilty: Pearce was sentenced to ten years', and Lawrence to four years' penal servitude. Of Lawrence's prison life it now becomes my place to speak.

At Millbank Prison she fell into the usual groove—became a quiet, well-disciplined prisoner, rather fine

in her manner and address, and inclined to disparage her fellow-prisoners. Rumour asserts that she was not long in prison before she used her best endeavours—or rather worst—to tamper with her officer's fidelity, promising the present of a valuable diamond for the transmission of a letter to Pearce, a prisoner in the male pentagon of Millbank Prison. Suspicions that there were diamonds still in her possession led to a sudden *raid* on Lawrence's habiliments and the furniture of her cell; and sewn up in her stays, and even within her bed, were found two or three of the glittering brilliants for the robbery of which she was undergoing the sentence of the law.

She was as much discomfited, it is said, at the discovery of her little hoard—the store which was to help to set her up in the world again in the days of her liberty—as I have no doubt the original owners, to whom the diamonds were restored, were gladdened by so unlooked-for a return of their valuable property.*

* The reader will perceive that I mention this anecdote as simply a rumour that has reached my ears. Still I have been at some pains to elicit the truth of the case before allowing it to appear in these pages, and from Messrs. Hunt & Roskell, Mr. Harry Emanuel, and Inspector Whicher, of the Metropolitan Police Detective Department, were received kind and courteous communications on the subject. Still there was a very curious discrepancy in their statements, which appears to me to leave the matter in some doubt. Inspector Whicher remarked that no diamonds were discovered on Emily Lawrence during her stay at Millbank, but that a diamond stud was found on James Pearce some months after conviction; whilst Mr. Emanuel informed me that my statement was quite correct, that diamonds were found upon her during her imprisonment, but that the small size of them prevented their identification as a portion of his missing property.

A dangerous woman, full of design, was Emily Lawrence; of insinuating manners, and ever suggesting something to her officer which was against the rules. At Brixton Prison, whither she was transferred, she continued the part of tempter, and, by her specious address and tempting promises of jewels, endeavoured to impose upon more than one inexperienced officer.

CHAPTER XLV.

PRISON DISCIPLINE: SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT THEREIN.—CONCLUDING REMARKS

IT is the great question of the day, "What is the best discipline for male and female convicts?" Has the English system failed, although introduced with caution, followed up with diligence, and closely watched in its results—or is the Irish system far ahead of it? I think the late Sir Joshua Jebb was right when he hinted, in one Memorandum, that the comparison was an unfair one—that the management of a handful of convicts would admit of many variations, which, with a larger number, would be found entirely impracticable. I believe honestly that the experiment of the Irish system in England would end in entire failure if followed out *in toto*, although there are some few points of management in the former which deserve a trial here.

I have no intention of entering the field of argument for and against a hundred different systems. I have to

the best of my ability spoken out where I considered it necessary, without regard for the outraged feelings of superiors, or "the divinity that doth hedge a" Director of Government prisons. In again briefly mentioning, by way of summary, some of the views I entertain, I shall have fulfilled part of the object with which this concluding chapter is written.

In the first place, though it is not a question of discipline, I would again raise my feeble protest against employing prisoners to work for City firms. It is a premium on crime; it indicates to many needlewomen, with no work on hand, where board and lodging and needlework can be obtained; it is the source of deadly competition with the honest; it is an unnatural expedient to reduce prison expenditure, that, in moral and enlightened England, with a thoughtful, feeling Lady on its throne, should be cried down by every honest soul with power to raise a voice against its glaring inconsistency.

This for the interest of society, and now for discipline.

It is suggested in Sir Joshua Jebb's Memorandum, to which I have recently alluded, that to secure fully all the advantages to be derived from the existing organisation in our prisons, increased means of superintendence are requisite, and that extra prison directors would be the best means to arrive at a result so desirable. But the discipline of prisons does not depend upon a few more gentlemen, with large salaries, upon the Board of Direction. Prison discipline rests in the careful selection of the prison staff: the warders, &c., of the male prisons—the matrons of the female.

I reiterate in this place, and it is a fact which I hope will secure the attention of all thoughtful men with power to speak out in Parliament, or in newspapers and magazines, *that the staff of matrons is not sufficient for the proper working of our female prisons*; that it has never been sufficient, and that the officers are worked too hard. Female prisoners must be treated *individually*; and when more attention can be paid to each woman, instead of to each class, results more satisfactory will be arrived at. Fourteen hours a-day for a prison matron—fourteen hours of mental excitement—are too many. It is acknowledged by the Direction that the superintendence of female convicts forms the most trying feature of prison experience; cannot the Directors imagine the uphill struggles of those officers who are anxious to do their duty faithfully to those prisoners with whom they are brought in contact? Much that cannot be reported for very shame's sake, and much that a superintendent or a director objects to have reported for the credit of the prisoners in general, occur day after day. Battling ever with an opposition untiring and incessant will, in time, surely undermine the strength of half the officers. Ten years' service commands a pension—will the Directors tell us what is the percentage of prison matrons who have ever earned one?

In addition to increasing the staff, let me urge here the importance of more care in its selection. Of late years the peculiar fitness of the applicant for the office has not been considered of so much moment as the influence or position of the person who recommends

the applicant. Favouritism in this respect is a wrong to the State, and a satire on all attempts at prison discipline. Lady friends of directors and superintendents will be ever prone to offer the services of their ladies' maids and upper servants; and though these may not pass the probationary stage, yet their constant introduction—the constant appearance of fresh faces—is a hindrance to the proper working of a complex machinery. Raise again the standard of qualification for prison matrons; let them be thoughtful, earnest, religious women, with as fair an amount of education to assist them as is to be expected from those seeking such shadowy byways of life for a profession!

And as "*the whole principle of discipline is to lead, and not to drive—to place a man's (or woman's) fate and condition mainly in his (or her) hands, and encourage and reward all efforts to do well*"—so the discretion and judgment of the *leaders* should be ever of paramount importance.

If the proper management of the prison could also be conducted with a less amount of routine—if there were more often little breaks to relieve the monotony, as there are little breaks of sunshine in the sky's darkness during days of stormy weather—the advantages, I think, would be immediately perceived. Lectures, on divers subjects calculated to interest and distract a prisoner's mind, are delivered in our Irish prisons; would it not be a great boon to our English female convicts if the same practice were commenced in our prisons?

Another defect in discipline appears capable of being corrected. A greater care in the selection of women for association would be an improvement—better for the working of the prison, and for the morals of the prisoners. The matrons are sufficient judges of character to tell who are the best suited for each other's society, whose example might be imitated with advantage, and whose influence would check a break-out or a fit of sullenness that may portend the more sad break-out which ends in the asylum. Little, if any, care is exercised as to the characters of the women in association, and much harm is done in consequence.

I have been forestalled in one suggestion I intended to make here—the removal of the worst class of prisoners to a separate establishment; the withdrawal altogether, as far as possible, of the evil example which spreads like a deadly blight from ward to ward. Where there are women wholly vile, whom nothing can affect—whom no religious teaching can soften—they are best apart from those whose weak minds are liable to be impressed by bad example.

I would suggest, also, a lunatic ward to every prison, or at least the separation of those women whose eccentricities are dangerous, and the condition of whose minds it is yet difficult to determine. When placed in association, it should be with careful prisoners; but they should be kept *apart*, both for the sake of the prisoners and their custodians.

As Broadmoor will be the destination of the worst

class of prisoners separated from the general body, so Fulham, without regard to age or antecedents, should be the fold in which to gather together the most exemplary of female convicts. And if, by means of a Government grant, the good effects of the Prisoners' Aid Society could be rendered still more comprehensive, and its sphere of usefulness more extended, the number of "returns" and "re-convictions," I am sure, would continue to diminish. The Prisoners' Aid Society is the Prison-Government's Aid Society also, and should be the fourth estate for *all* prisoners who hope to lead better lives.

In conclusion, let me remind the reader that my object in laying these chronicles before him has been simply to show him a little of the life and character excluded from the world; I have attempted to throw no fictitious element over scenes that might have been enhanced by such means, feeling convinced that there were sufficient incidents to interest a reader, and that if they failed to do so, the fault would be in my mode of telling them rather than in the incidents themselves. I have done my best.

An old writer once said—

"All this world's a prison,
Heaven the high wall about it, sin the jailour."

And in some senses it may be said that all the world is in a prison. All the world's elements, good and bad, the teachers of right and the scoffers at it; the

honest and hard-working ; those in whom pride goeth before a fall ; the rich, the poor, the jealous, the vain, the evil-speaking, the lying and slandering, all are as common to this dark sphere within as to the world without. In this little world is more of life's discord than harmony—too many wrecks cast ashore from the surging waters that are never still—a world in its entirety, with all its troubles, ambitions, and responsibilities.

To judge that world honestly and in all fairness, was the task I set myself some years ago. In all honesty and fairness, I claim the right to be judged.

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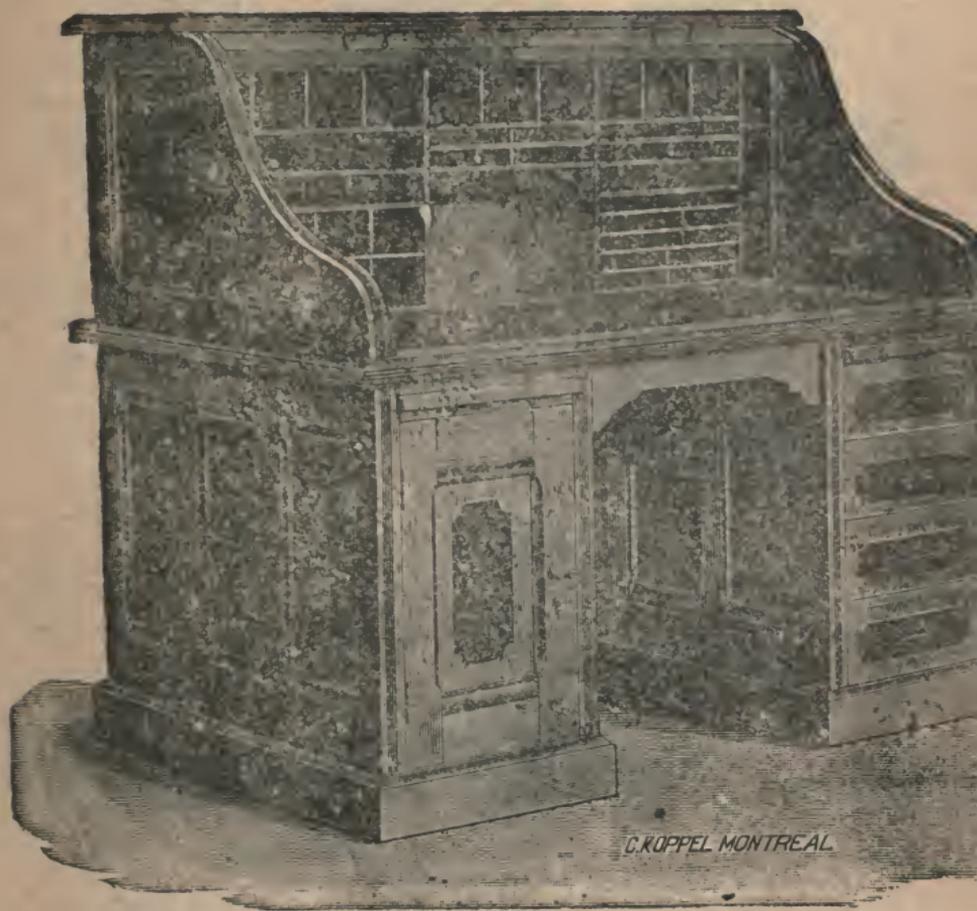
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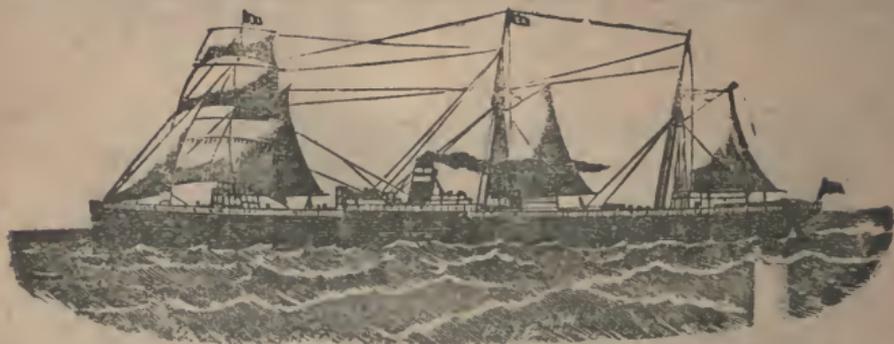


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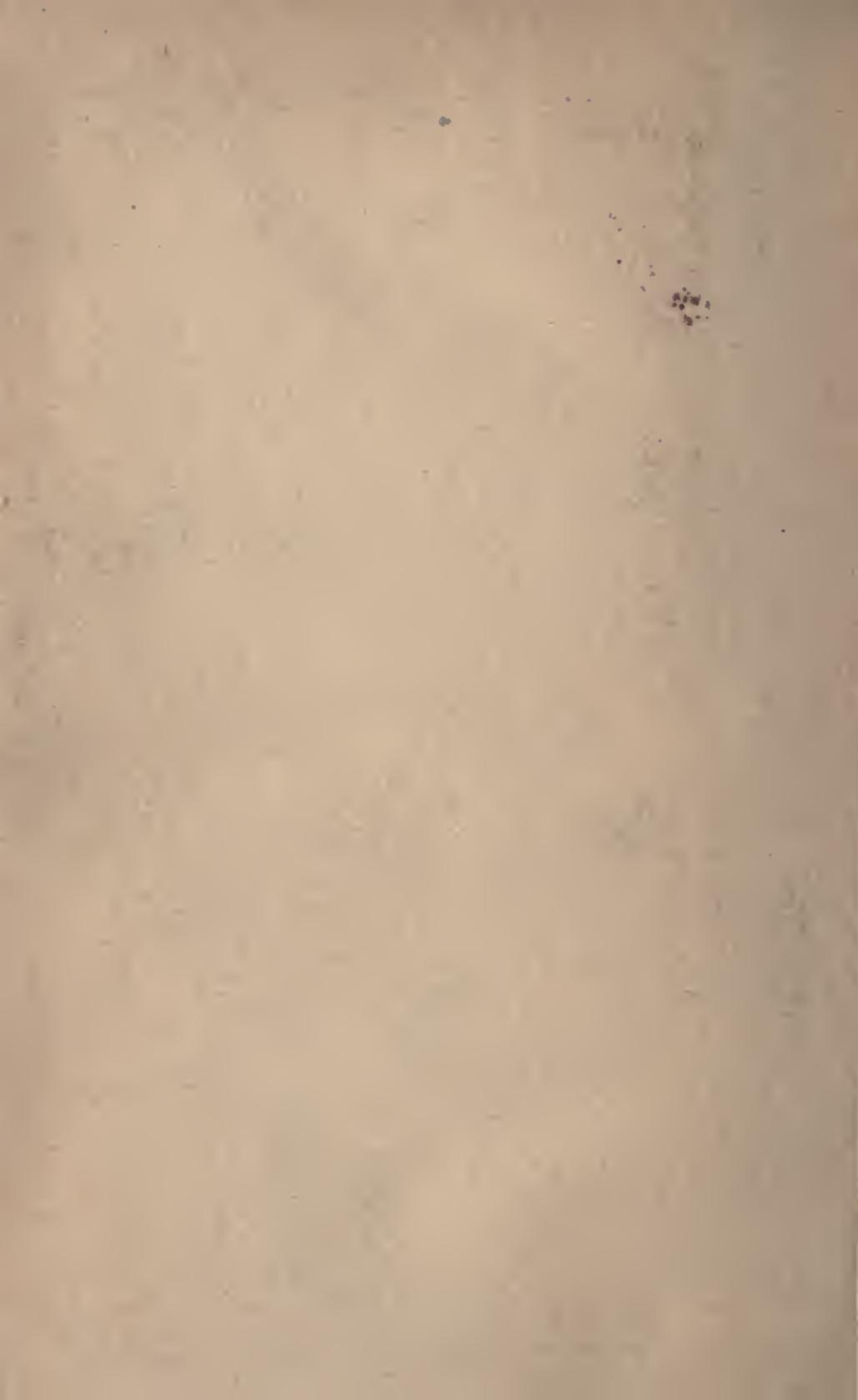
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